

VOLUME EIGHT

YOGA SADHANA PANORAMA



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

YOGA SADHANA
PANORAMA
VOLUME EIGHT

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

YOGA SADHANA PANORAMA

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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs and discourses given in cities of India
from 2002 to 2008*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Yoga Sadhana Panorama Volume Eight

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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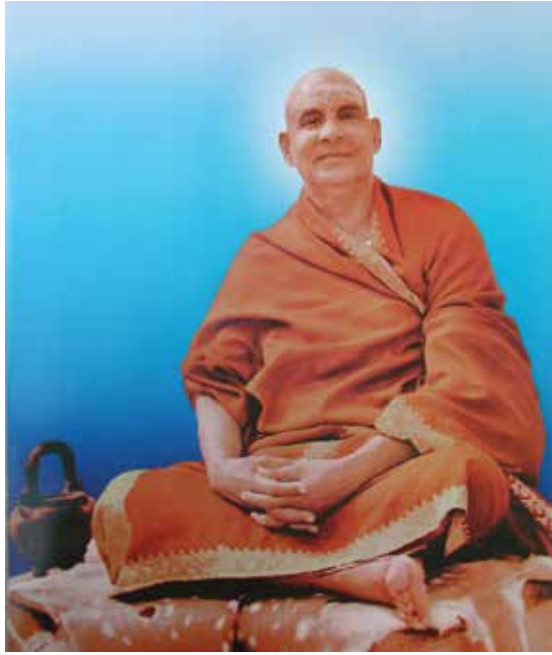
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

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2004

Kolkata



Raja Yoga

20 September 2004, Gyan Manch, Kolkata

Today I want to tell you how yoga can be lived in your life. According to the precepts of Sri Swami Sivananda, if you are sincere in your aspiration to experience spiritual life, and if you are ready to convert your life into a transcendental and divine life, then for you, yoga has to begin with the effort of cultivating and developing a balanced frame of mind, attitude, wisdom and performance. In the films presenting the life of Swami Sivananda's disciples who were with him in the early days of the ashram, they say, "While we were in the ashram with our Guru Swami Sivanandaji, we did not have time for any sadhana. We did not have time for any formal practice of yoga whether it was asana or meditation, kundalini yoga or kriya yoga, hatha yoga or any other form of yoga." The disciples of Swami Sivananda made it very clear, "While we were with our guru his mandate to us was: just serve, just work. Work and through work remove the bondage of karma. Once the bondage of karma is removed, you can experience spiritual life and the light will emanate from you."

This statement of Swami Sivananda holds true for all the disciples who stayed with him and served him. What was that service? Climbing two hundred steps carrying buckets of water from the Ganga to the ashram for pooja and construction work, or printing literature, transcribing his lectures, managing the ashram.

All this goes against your concept of an ashram for you believe an ashram to be a place where people have plenty of

time to do their sadhana, and perhaps there are many ashrams in India where you do get plenty of time to do your sadhana. I am talking specifically of the yoga as described and taught by Swami Sivananda and Patanjali. This is not the first time service has been emphasized. Even in the vedic period, in the Upanishads, emphasis on karma yoga and seva was given to aspirants before they actually embarked upon their spiritual journey.

Here is an example: three disciples go to the sage with questions in their mind. When they go to the sage and place their questions before him, he says, “Before I answer your questions, you must live in the ashram for the period of one year, working hard, in service. Forget about your sadhana and studies, what you know and what you don’t know. After one year come to me and ask your questions and I will answer you.” After the completion of one year, one disciple comes and asks a question and the guru answers him. The others come and ask their question, and the Guru answers them. This became the *Prashnopanishad*, one of the major treatises.

This example states one fact, one spiritual secret. It has been the understanding and the vision of our seers, our *rishis*, that if you are truly committed to spiritual life, then your journey does not begin with asana or pranayama or meditation, but with living the yogic lifestyle.

Yoga is a subject which is important for human beings and especially for children. Just as you go to school to be educated and to increase the capacity of your intellect, with the practice of yoga you increase it much more. You have heard of Swami Vivekananda. When he was living in Chicago, he used to go to the library, take home big volumes of books and return them the next day. This happened many times. The librarian became curious. He thought, ‘Who is this person in orange, who comes here every day, takes out big volumes and returns them the next day?’ So, when Swami Vivekananda was returning the books the next time, the librarian asked him, “Why do you take so many books out which you don’t even read as you are returning them the next day?”

Swami Vivekananda said, “What do you mean, I don’t read them? I read each and every page of each book. Not just one book but all the volumes.” The librarian did not believe it. He said, “What do you mean? You read each and every page of all the books?” Swami Vivekananda said, “Yes! And you can test me!” So the librarian opened a book, selected a page and paragraph, and said, “Page 30, paragraph 3, can you tell me what is written there?” Swami Vivekananda repeated the sentence as it was written in the book, without even looking at it. The librarian was astounded, and did many more tests. Swami Vivekananda repeated the exact words and sentences that were written in the book. Later on the librarian discovered that Swami Vivekananda had a photographic memory. His eyes, his mind, would capture the image of the page whenever he wanted, he could just recall a book, a page, a sentence: that was the capacity of his brain and mind.

How did he develop this capacity? He did not have this capacity when he was the ordinary Narendra. If you read his stories he used to have many difficulties and many problems in his own life, and his family used to have a lot of problems. Yet, when he started to practise yoga with sincerity, he was able to develop a quality of brain, which is known as a having photographic memory. We can also become like that. We can develop the faculty, the potential, the quality of our brain and mind, provided we know how to use and apply yoga. Yoga is a subject of mind. Yoga is not primarily a subject of spiritual development or spiritual realization. According to tradition, yoga is a subject of mind.

As a student you have also faced your mind. You know how difficult it is to focus on the subject and to remember information. You know how, at the time of examinations, all the effort you have put into your studies suddenly dissipates, and your mind becomes blank; how, despite having full confidence to give good answers on the topic, when you go into the exam room, your mind becomes totally blank. That is the experience which we all have had in our childhood, and we have come to know that to deal with the brain, and

to develop the faculty and the potential of the brain, is very difficult. Yoga provides the solution. I will tell you how yoga can help you with your questions.

How to develop concentration, how to face the exams without getting nervous, and how to memorize things?

One of the faculties of mind is memory, another one is intellect, and another one is understanding. We have to manage understanding, intellect and memory.

People in the past have given a lot of thought on how to improve the quality of life, the body and mind. After thinking about it, they came up with the process of yoga. They devised yogic techniques in accordance with the natural laws of the body. In the body there are many glands, and in the young, the gland which is most active is the pineal gland in the centre of the head. It is the most important gland responsible for the development of the cerebral and mental faculty. Yoga says that if you can maintain the health of that particular gland, which usually begins to decay after the age of eight, then the learning process, the capacity to retain information and memory improves.

For the maintenance of this gland, they devised three techniques. The first technique is surya namaskara, which most of you know and have practised at one time or another. The second technique is trataka, to develop concentration. The third technique is nadi shodhana pranayama, to balance the two hemispheres of the brain.

Surya namaskara

The practice of surya namaskara is composed of seven different postures. These seven postures affect and influence different areas, organs and glands of the body, and ensure that they perform in an optimum manner. *Surya namaskara* means 'salute to the sun'. This practice is to be done in the morning. When the environment is calm, when you are fresh and without tension and stress of studies and other factors.

This practice of surya namaskara is done to improve the circulation of blood, to energize the different parts and

organs of the body and control the breath as breath plays an important role. When you are angry, tense, or frustrated, your breathing will become shallow and fast. When you are relaxed and peaceful, the breathing will be deep and long. Scientifically, it has been proven that breath controls many of the activities of the brain. With control of breath, you can alter the state of the mind, you can reduce stress from the brain and nervous system, and experience harmony and tranquillity. This is why surya namaskara was given as the first practice to students for developing their brain capacity.

Trataka

The second practice is of trataka. It is the most effective practice to develop concentration and a photographic memory. During exams do it for five minutes before you begin your studies and for five minutes at night. You will find this practice useful.

You light a candle, place the candle on something safe, and arrange it so that the flame is at eye level. You look straight at the flame – without blinking the eyes – for one minute, or half a minute, or as long as you are able to keep your eyes open without straining. When you feel the need to close your eyes, then close them and see the after-image of the flame between the closed eyes.

When the after-image disappears, and the screen behind the closed eyes becomes blank again, then open the eyes and look at the flame, without blinking the eyes. When you cannot keep the eyes open and feel the need to blink, close the eyes again. Whenever you close the eyes you will see the after-image of the flame. Look at it in a steady manner. You will find that the image is moving, it won't be static: sometimes it will move up, to the left, to the right, or down. You have to make an effort to hold that image fixed at one point and not allow it to move. Do this for five minutes in exam times before going to sleep and during study time before you begin your studies. You will see the difference. In a couple of days, you will find whatever you read, you are able to retain and memorize much better. This practice develops mental

concentration. For all of you to succeed in your studies, this practice is one of the most important.

Pranayama

The third practice is of pranayama. Bhramari pranayama, plugging the ears and humming like a bee – is one pranayama which balances the way we feel. It helps us to be calm and it improves the memory. The brain has two hemispheres. To integrate and balance the faculties of both hemispheres of the brain there is one practice known as nadi shodhana pranayama.

If you understand it and try it, you will find that the retention capacity of the brain will increase with this practice. You will be able to memorize anything with much less effort.

You are able to improve your physical health and stamina, and to balance your glands and nervous system with surya namaskara. You can develop your concentration with the practice of trataka and through enhancing the health of the pineal gland which will ensure that there is proper development of mind and intelligence. Then pranayama gives emotional and mental balance, improves retention and memory. These practices are important. Apart from this, you can do anything else. Whatever you wish to do, you can even tie yourself up in a kind of knot and that is fine, however to succeed in studies and to develop control over the mind, these three practices are a must.

We have a group of about 81,000 children who are members of the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal. Their age group is from eight to fourteen, they look after their own organization and manage their own affairs. After the age of fourteen, the children retire from this organization. Until the age of fourteen, we teach them certain basic practices of yoga. We have found that over the years many of these children who were absolutely weak in their studies, now give excellent performances. There have been times when the children have been occupied in teaching yoga to other children in different parts of the country and did not get time to do their own studies. Just before the exams, they went through

their books, sat for the exam and came in the merit list. So far, in Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal we have had overwhelming success. This success was recorded and the data was sent to UNESCO. On the basis of this information and research, UNESCO authorized the teaching of yoga in its schools in seventeen countries of Europe. Now in seventeen countries of Europe, yoga is officially taught in schools and colleges. We teach only the most basic things that students can use to improve their studies and their mind. Apart from this, there is another success story.

Yoga nidra

Once a small boy came to the ashram and he was never sent to any school, yet that boy was taught everything, science, art, commerce or any subject. That boy was taught languages by the use of one special practice and that practice is known as yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is a technique which you do when you are sleeping or before you fall asleep in bed. It is something you cannot do alone. A teacher has to guide you.

So this boy was taught everything, from science to arts, to languages, to literature, to scripture, while he was sleeping. The boy used to go to sleep and the teacher used to give instructions when the boy was sleeping. His mind used to register those instructions. Many times, in sleep, chapters of different books were read. The next day, when the boy was up and awake, the teacher read the same chapter which he had read when the boy was sleeping. The boy used to say, "I know that subject, I know the content." He would be able to describe what was written in the chapter. This was an experiment which showed that even in our sleep, our mind is able to register information.

Later on, I did one experiment myself, with one girl. I used to give her the practice of yoga nidra and teach her things during this type of sleep. This girl was a German girl, about eight years old. When they put her in school in Germany, she went to the class one day and after that in the evening she said, "I am not going to go anymore because all the things they have taught there, I already know." So the

parents put her in another class, after talking to the school director. This girl went to the second class and said, “No, I am not going to study anymore, because I know everything that they are teaching.” That girl has only gone to school for one week in the first class, the second class, third class, fourth class and knows all the subjects. Tests have been taken and she has passed every test. She is fourteen now, and this year she is admitted in a college. This is an example of how the technique of yoga nidra can work on the human mind; and I am the boy on whom that experiment was done initially and who was taught everything in sleep, and who never went to school.

This is the effect of yoga. Therefore, you have to give yoga a chance in your life. If you are sincerely committed to the practice of yoga, within one year, you will be a different student. If you practise seriously the practices that have been described to you today – surya namaskara, trataka and nadi shodhana pranayama, then next time I come, you will be having a different problem. Today you are telling me, “We have difficulty in concentration and attention.” Next year, you will be telling me, “We have outgrown our school, and don’t get admission anywhere because we are too young to join.” You decide which problem you want to face – the lack of concentration problem or the problem of excellence?

If it is the problem of excellence, it means that you have committed yourself. Therefore, do not think of yoga as a set of physical exercises that you do for health or for eradication of disease or illness. Think of yoga as a way to improve and develop the strength, the quality and the faculty of your brain, mind and life. I am sure that you will have a successful life all the way through, right from your studies to your future life. This is the message of yoga for all of you and I am truly inspired and happy when I see all of you practise yoga with such determination and dedication, and I wish that it becomes a habit in your life.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Why do I lose self-confidence?

We become too conscious of our failures and limitations. The moment you are able to focus on your strength and not worry about your limitations, the future becomes bright. The moment you identify with your limitations, the future becomes bleak and dark. All of us have a bright future, brilliant future, provided we know how to handle ourselves in different situations.

How do you settle a fight with a friend without drifting apart as a result of the fight?

There is a simple solution. Don't carry the fight with you. Have a big fight – pull each other's hair, give a slap, pick and pinch. Do anything you want to do, but after the fight, when the fight is over, don't carry it with you. Drifting apart happens when you carry the frustration with you. You fought this morning but you are still carrying the effect of the fight this evening. You will carry the effect, the impression of the fight, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow and that will give birth to more hatred and jealousy. Then you will drift apart. Instead go and shake hands. If you can develop this ability then that quality in you will be recognized by others as a virtue, and people will appreciate who you are.

How to increase height?

There are two things you can do. I did it myself when I was a small boy. Thirty years ago. I was only 3 feet high, and that was where I was stuck. When I came to the ashram, my Guruji taught me two postures – sarvangasana and tadasana. These practices improve height.

Can you talk to us about spiritual life and Sri Swamiji?

Your journey does not begin with asana, pranayama or meditation. It begins with an attempt and an effort to purify yourself mentally, emotionally and physically. It begins

with an effort to develop the concept of righteousness and appropriateness in life. It begins with the understanding of your own responses, actions and reactions. This is what the disciples of Swami Sivananda tell us. The people who are inquisitive and identify with the needs of the mind, and who wish to find wellbeing, health and peace in life, can begin their yoga with asana, pranayama, meditation, hatha yoga.

Our idea of spirituality is so distorted; we don't know what spirituality means. Since we identify with our body, with our mind and we wish to see them in a healthy, harmonious and peaceful state, we begin our yoga with the practice of asana, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, shatkarmas, japa, kirtan, meditation, and so on. Once an understanding dawns within us of what true spiritual life is, then our own understanding of yoga is also going to go through a change. Swami Satyananda, our Guru, after completing twelve years of living with his guru, was called by Swami Sivananda and given instructions, "Your twelve years are complete, you are free to travel and serve humanity." Swami Satyananda tells us that in fifteen minutes, Swami Sivananda gave him complete instructions on kriya yoga and 108 rupees. Within half an hour, Sri Swamiji was out of the ashram, with a mandate from his guru to spread the message of yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.

It was then that Swamiji started to think of how he was going to fulfil the mandate of his guru. Although he did not have any opportunity to practise asana, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, shatkarmas, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga while he was in his guru's ashram, for he was totally involved in service, he discovered that the first principles of Sivananda yoga became the foundation for experiencing and developing yoga in his life. When Sri Swamiji started the propagation of yoga, the first thing he did was to ensure that the practices of yoga were accessible and understandable to people in society. The practices of yoga were researched to see their effect on the human personality, the human body, mind, and emotions. Definitely it is a matter of pride for all of us, that it was Swami Satyananda who classified and systematized the

practices of asanas, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, pratyahara and dharana, which are accessible to all of us in his books.

Prior to Swami Satyananda no other person had classified yoga. People knew asana but they did not know the sequence of practice. They knew about pranayama but the misconception about pranayama was that if you practise it you will go mad – so don't practise it. People did not know about the shatkarmas, shankaparakshalana. He was the first one to bring it to light. Meditation was just one word for everybody, but which were the practices belonging to pratyahara, which ones to dharana, and how does the progression from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana take place? This was conceived and extracted from the traditional scriptures by Sri Swamiji, along with the practices which we practise today in the form of yoga nidra, antar mouna, ajapa japa, chidakasha dharana, pancha vyoma dharana. There are so many practises of pratyahara and so many practises of dharana.

At the same time, he inspired research into the various components of yoga in the management of physical health. How can the practices of asana, the postures, change the function of the endocrine gland system, the digestive system, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system? There was research on various illnesses. For twenty years Sri Swamiji worked hard to develop a scientific, practical and understandable approach to yoga.

As long as Sri Swamiji was involved in the development of the yoga subject as a science, a culture, a tradition, an academic subject, never once did he speak of God. The life of Swami Satyananda is an example of the development, growth and progression of yoga and spirituality in the life of an individual. In the life of Paramahansaaji I see two distinct areas of expressing yoga. The first was the practical and the scientific knowledge of yoga, when he established the Bihar School of Yoga. Today the teachings of Bihar School of Yoga are recognized world over, either by the name of Satyananda Yoga or Bihar Yoga Tradition. Then, when he left the ashram, he began to live the ideals of spiritual life. I am making a differentiation between yoga and spiritual life. Spiritual

experience is an outcome of a balanced, harmonious and integrated mind.

I see the life of Sri Swamiji in two parts. The first part of his life he propagated yoga and the second part of his life he lived the ideals of yoga. We practise yoga, we don't live the ideals of yoga. The moment we begin to live the ideals of yoga, spiritual realization dawns. To live the ideals of yoga, we have to come back to the external expression of that yogic experience in our life, and we come back in a circle, back to the precepts of Swami Sivananda.

2005

Bhubaneshwar

Delhi



Guru Poornima Mahotsav

21–22 July 2005,
Satyananda Yogavidyalaya, Bhubaneshwar

We come together to participate in the event of Guru Poornima, to understand the disciplines of spiritual life and imbibe the teachings of the gurus, masters and luminaries who have come to this world from time to time to give direction for the upliftment of humanity, which are contained in the eternal teachings of seers and sages.

Fullness

You have the honour of participating in an event in which you are able to express your faith, devotion and dedication to the cause of upliftment – the personal and the impersonal. It is this upliftment that you all seek in life. It comes to you in the form of plenty, peace and prosperity. The concept of plenty means that all the absences disappear from life. Everything is obtained, fulfilled, achieved. There is no vacuum, no absence in life. Whether it be material prosperity or a mental state of contentment, happiness and joy, physical health or the strong creative, ethical character of a person, the expressions can be manifold, you live in that sense of wellbeing. You experience fullness in life – *poornata*. That is the statement of the shrutis as well. It is said in the Shanti Mantra of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*:

*Om poornamada, poornamidam, poornat poornamudachayate
Poornassaya poornamadaya poornameva vashishayate*

Everything by nature is whole, and only its nature has to be recognized. What is the ultimate potentiality of the seed?

When you hold a seed in your hand, you are holding the possibility of an entire creation and manifestation from birth to death. That seed which you hold in your hands is endowed with the capacity to become a fruit-laden tree. Within the fruits, again you have the same potential, which allows the seeds to become giant trees.

In order to give birth to the other seeds, with the same *shakti*, the same potency, the original seed has to die. In death, there is the maturing and flowering of the total potential of the seed. It becomes a small plant, a small tree, a giant tree, laden with flowers and fruits. Inside the fruit exists the same manifestation of the original seed, with the same potency or *shakti*.

Just as in a seed, you can perceive the entire creation, birth, development, decay and death, when you look at yourself, you can also perceive the potency which is existing within yourself to excel in life, to overcome the misery, pain and suffering in life. It is this effort which is known as the spiritual effort or spiritual *sadhana* – the attempt to become positive, creative, virtuous, optimistic in your approach, attitude, belief and understanding. These are the characteristics of a dynamic personality, of a person able to perceive their self-contained potentials and strives to utilize them for the upliftment of themselves and other people.

Sankalpa

We have expressed our faith, devotion and dedication to this belief and understanding that we shall strive to attain excellence in life, in thought, word and deed. It is the attainment of excellence in thought, speech and action, which will be our *sadhana* to qualify as human beings, and thereby follow the teachings of the seers and sages. It is for this that you have come from different parts to offer your homage, worship and faith to the tradition, the *parampara*, of gurus – the unbroken lineage of enlightened beings who have walked upon this planet. They have given the message of peace, creativity, and inspired the cultivation of the positive qualities of love, compassion, sympathy and identification.

What do you take with you from here? First of all, a routine and discipline which you can apply every day in your day-to-day life. In the morning, for the welfare, wellbeing and health of each one in the family, chant the Mahamritunjaya mantra eleven times. It is a powerful mantra of healing, which helps to overcome the distracted, dissipated and obsessive facets of personality, and to give a sense of complete wellbeing and healing by eradicating everything that is the cause of ill health and ill thoughts, ill behaviour and ill actions. Therefore, for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare, wellbeing and health, the Mahamritunjaya mantra should be chanted eleven times in every family in the morning, regardless of caste, creed, belief, religion, tradition, sampradaya.

The second chanting is of the Gayatri mantra eleven times. It bestows simplicity and peace upon the chanter, the ability to discriminate, and to live with knowledge and wisdom. The Gayatri mantra opens the closed doors of the dormant mind. It infuses wisdom in one's life and inspires one to tread the virtuous and righteous path.

Every morning, this should be the first sadhana of every householder or spiritual aspirant, separate from their yoga practice, worship, aradhana, archana, and mantra japa. This represents your sankalpa: the desire and aspiration to attain health at all levels of existence, to attain wisdom and to live according to the precepts of righteousness. This is the need of everyone. It is the special effort, which you have to make to live a healthy and happy life. That is the vision for the fulfilment of human life according to the Indian tradition, shastras and seers. That is the goal, aim and object of life.

Take this as the blessings of this Guru Purnima. Carry it with you to your home, practise yourself and inspire other people to practise the chanting of the Mahamritunjaya mantra and Gayatri mantra eleven times. You will see the difference it will bring in your own life, a difference in your peace, your own attitude and perceptions. You will experience peace and prosperity in life.

Spiritual journey

If you have to go on a long journey by car, you check the petrol, air, the radiator water, oil, brake fluid, water in the batteries. You go through a procedure of checking and ensuring that everything is working in proper order in your car. When you are convinced that everything is okay, then with peace of mind, you undertake a long journey with conviction and with the knowledge that you have checked everything in the car and everything is functioning all right, and there is no possibility of any accident or breakdown on the way.

Just as you check your car before a journey in the same manner, on the spiritual journey too, a check has to happen on the entire personality. What is the brake of your car on your spiritual journey? *Vichara sanyam* is the brake on your journey of spiritual life.

As you progress in spiritual life, you come across different experiences, understandings, realizations and perceptions which are unique to yourself. These different experiences or perceptions can alter the state of ego and *buddhi*, intellect, and take you towards a restricted nature or life, and not towards an expanded nature or life. In the *Ishavasya Upanishad*, it is stated that knowledge can lead you towards light, yet at the same time, it can also propel you into deeper darkness. Knowledge can lead you towards light, yet if that knowledge is not applied in the right manner and understanding, then it may take you to even greater darkness than ignorance by inflating the ego, cultivating arrogance, close-mindedness and assertiveness which is tamasic by nature. Therefore, *vichara sanyam*, control of thoughts and cultivation of positive thoughts are the brakes against accidents in spiritual life.

It is easy to fall prey to negative speech. In gossip and criticism, the negative, comparative, critical, analytical, judgemental aspect comes out and is directed towards another person. Speech and thought reflect what you are inside. If you have refined speech, you have a refined mentality. If you have gross speech, you have a gross mentality. *Vani* or *vakya sanyam*, control of speech, and *vichara sanyam* are the brakes

that control the accidents of spiritual life. The idea is to retain mental positivity, and these two mantras help.

The Gayatri and Mahamritunjaya mantra should be practised by everyone regularly. As you check your car to ensure all systems are working properly, the different yogas have to be practised. Practise your asana every morning, 10 or 15 minutes, pranayama 10 or 15 minutes. Practise relaxation, yoga nidra either during the day or at night before going to sleep. When you practise yoga nidra at night, you don't have to do the sankalpa 'I will not sleep'. If sleep comes, go to sleep. Practise ten minutes of meditation, nothing too difficult or abstract. Sit down quietly for ten minutes on your chair, bed, or floor, wherever you are. Choose a time when you are undisturbed and not bothered by anything, and are free from the mental worries and associations of work, expectation, achievement, success and failure. In those ten minutes, sitting quietly, observe your breath. See the flow of breath in the passage between the navel and the eyebrow centre. Say your mantra with the breath for ten minutes. This should become part of your routine in life.

Sanyam – your spiritual investment

This much investment is the right investment for you to ensure health of body, mind, emotions, spiritual development and spiritual progress. This much investment should be made and must be made. How you adjust it, how you incorporate it in your life, you have to see. I have given you ideas and hints, now you have to adjust, incorporate and use this understanding, system and knowledge to improve the quality of life.

Once a year for a week, two weeks, a month, whatever time you can give conveniently, visit an ashram or tirtha for spiritual regeneration. In India, you have the opportunity of spending time in ashrams. India is a land of ashrams. There are hundreds and thousands of ashrams throughout the country where you can go and spend some time in a different environment where the ideas, speech, thoughts, mentality and concepts that are lived are different to the normal ones you live in society.

Spend some time there and it will rejuvenate you and recharge your batteries. People go for relaxation to hill stations or nice tourist spots. They go for *manoranjana*, pleasing the mind and senses. If you go to an ashram or a *tirtha*, you don't have *manoranjana* there. You have *atmaranjana*, you please the soul, the spirit. Food is required for the body, for without food and nourishment, the body cannot survive. Just as happiness is the nourishment for the mind, internal discipline is the nourishment for the spirit. *Bhoga* is the nourishment of the *indriyas*, the senses, and *sanyam* is the nourishment of the spirit, the *atman*. *Sanyam* has to be your focus in life to tread the spiritual path.

In order to experience *sanyam*, to experience *atmaranjana*, the pleasing state to spirit, one needs to spend time in a *tirtha*, a place of pilgrimage, having *satsangs*, *deva darshan*, participating in *bhajans* and *kirtans* or spending some time in the presence or vicinity of the guru involved and immersed in *seva*, service, day and night. Only then will you be able to really understand what spiritual life is all about. Now you are trying to understand spiritual life by adjusting it with your routine in life. You are trying to follow the spiritual life by adjusting it with your material life.

An invitation

If people want to come to the ashram for a course to learn how to meditate or for health management, they enquire about the possibility of coming to the ashram to fulfil their aspiration. They are worried about the room, whether they will get individual room, or common room, whether there is an attached toilet or not. This is how their mind works; their focus is not on what they want to learn, but on the room and the toilet.

When you spend time in an ashram, you live a life, which is different to your social, family and home life. When you go on a *tirtha*, you need a different life. That different life makes you confront a different nature of yourself, your expectations, mind, ideas, thoughts. You have to either accommodate it, accept it, or reject it.

A breakthrough can take place in your consciousness. That possibility is there in Rikhiadham and in Munger. Everyone is welcome. Recharge yourself spiritually. Come back home with a new inspiration to again face and confront life. Gradually, in this manner, modify your life so that you are able to experience all the auspicious qualities that life has to offer you and thus live a complete life. Today, not only here at the Satyananda Yogavidyalaya, but throughout India and the world, this day is being celebrated in the form of Guru Poornima – the day on which the disciple, the *shishya*, the aspirant pays heartfelt homage to the guru and to the tradition of the gurus.

If you analyze the need of a human being, then you find that the guru plays an important role. The role of the guru is to inspire the aspirant to live a life in which he or she can experience fulfilment, completeness and wholeness. The relationship between guru and disciple is aspired for and cherished. Today, spiritual aspirants all over the world have expressed and manifested their faith, devotion and dedication to this unbroken lineage of the luminaries who have come upon this world to guide humanity from time to time.

It is also the auspicious day of Ashada Poornima, also known as Vyasa Poornima. The most interesting component of this event which we can experience is the expression of inner bhakti, inner faith, and the connection with an idea, an inspiration, which is going to uplift us. This connection is going to save us from the trials and tribulations, problems and frustrations of life, and bring us the experience of joy, contentment and happiness.

What a beautiful connection it is! It is a spiritual connection which is not oriented or guided by personal or selfish motivations but by the feelings of faith, *shraddha*. It is one of the most beautiful expressions of an individual in life, the ability to express shraddha. Shraddha is the pure quality of the heart, of *bhavana*, emotions. Today we have this opportunity to connect with this special feeling, while paying homage to the gurus who have enlightened our path.

Today, the teachings of Swami Sivananda are relevant to our lives and to the prevailing social conditions, environments

and social mentalities. While the drive of the senses is outwards in the search of prosperity and happiness, there is also an inner urge to attain excellence and creativity in life, *praveenata* and *pratibha*, excellence without which no effort and no endeavour can succeed. It is this quest for excellence and creativity that brings people to spiritual life, inspires and motivates them to spiritual ideas and beliefs and to cultivate the positive, sattwic, virtuous qualities. It is this quest which inspires people to live the life of *sadvichara*, *sadvyavahara* and *satkarma*, right thinking, right behaviour and right action. This has to be the attainment of life, the purpose of human *purusharthas* or human efforts. It has to be the purpose of human dharma as well.

Dharma is the natural effort of everyone to experience the divine within oneself. When you experience the divine within yourself, you cultivate positive virtues and overcome the tamasic vrittis within, and attain the sattwic, luminous nature of mind, emotions and consciousness, which is called enlightenment. This is the teaching to which we subscribe as sannyasins and citizens of a country with a rich spiritual heritage. We dedicate ourselves to experience this in our life. That is the sadhana of the spiritual aspirants.

This auspicious occasion of Guru Poornima Mahotsav is dedicated to Swami Sivananda, the luminary of the last century, whose teachings are spreading all over the world, inspiring people to live a transformed, qualitative, virtuous life. May the blessings of Guru Poornima reach out to each and every one of you, inspiring you to tread the path of virtuousness, auspiciousness and righteousness, and this sankalpa is for you to take and live in your life.

Awakening Life's Potentials

5 August 2005, Ramjas College, Delhi

A gardener has a small piece of barren land. He wants to convert it into a beautiful garden. So he has to prepare the land, remove the weeds and rocks, mix the earth, break the dry earth and prepare the ground. When the soil is ready, he brings the seeds, plants them and looks after them until they are able to flower and give fruit. If a gardener goes through such a process to create a garden of his liking, then why don't you bring this concept of gardening into your life?

Therefore, the theme of today is: become a gardener of your life. The moment you can become a gardener of your life, your life potentials will develop spontaneously, automatically, naturally, for they are contained, inherent inside, waiting for the right opportunity to manifest. You have to give this right opportunity to yourself.

When you are running around in your life, what is the aim behind it? Is it success, economic security, becoming famous in society, playing a positive role in the evolution and creation of society? Whatever effort a person makes, the aim behind it is that there be name, fame, happiness, contentment, prosperity, peace. This is what you wish for in your race in life, from birth to death.

The mental conditioning created as a result of this wish proves to be a hindrance in the development of your mind. The central point of yoga is development of the human mind. This aim should be considered the foundation of yoga, and the method of mind development in yoga is related to your

behavioural, social, and material life. If you can understand this relationship, then, according to yoga, life becomes meaningful and you can identify your intentions and goals. The basic character of a human being is to seek material, financial, emotional, intellectual and social fulfilment. The drive and effort of everyone is to attain prosperity. Prosperity is a goal of life, fulfilment and satisfaction are goals of life, and your effort is to experience the goal. When the search for prosperity, peace and contentment falter, the results are undesirable.

You have to come back to the basic idea – your life. You have to see your mind as a field on which you can work. If you simply ignore the field and do not cultivate the good, the appropriate, eventually what will happen is there will be an overgrowth of weeds and the land will become unusable for some time until you are able to remove the weeds.

Focus on the mind

In your life, in the drive for prosperity, fulfilment, contentment and satisfaction in the material world, you ignore a basic rule governing human life. You have never considered the development of mind to be important, rather you have considered the development of intellect to be important for your progress, success and security in life. However, the intellect is only one part, one small component of the mind. The focus and foundation of yoga is to develop the entire mind. Unless and until you begin to work with your mind, the mind is not utilized, for what you think does not reflect the functions and the activities of the mind. What you desire does not reflect the nature of the mind. What you think are thoughts that come to the surface of your mind, what you desire are aspirations and ambitions, and you seek their immediate fulfilment – or in the near future.

According to yogic traditions, the mind is composed of ego or *ahamkara*, intellect or *buddhi*, analysis and the power of reflection or *manas*, and *chitta*, the memories and impressions in our psyche throughout the course of our life. Intellect, memories, ego and the ability to reflect are the four aspects

of the human mind, out of which you have emphasized the development and activation of intellect. You have not been able to regulate or manage the activities of ego. You have not been able to manage or utilize the wisdom contained in your memories. You have not been able to use properly the power of analysis and reflection. Today, despite having so much knowledge, understanding and wisdom around, you are still ignorant of the basic facts and conditions of life.

According to yoga, to improve the quality of life, you have to focus on the mind, which is the engine. Just as the car cannot run without its engine, in the same way, your life becomes redundant if it is not guided by the powers of the mind. It is the management and development of the mind potential which is the aim of yoga, according to classical scriptures.

Maharishi Patanjali, who codified yoga, represents a tradition of the Indian civilization in which yoga had already come to its apex. Yoga was well known to everybody, and therefore the teachings of Maharishi Patanjali are in the form of *sutras*, small sentences, not in the form of books, scriptures or essays. These sutras or statements indicate that the knowledge of people of that time was such that just by being given a hint they would understand.

What is yoga? *Atha yoga anushasanam* – instruction and guidelines on yoga, disciplines that can be followed, implemented and incorporated. What is the outcome of these disciplines? *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – attainment of mental balance. What happens after you attain inner, mental balance? *Tadaa drashtuh svaroope'vasthaanam* – then you realize your true nature. These three statements of yoga are the most important and crucial statements which define the entire philosophy, theory and practice of raja yoga. If the mind is not stimulated, focused, concentrated and made positive, it will fall into negative traps which come through association with the outside world.

Negative traps

What are the negative traps? There is a beautiful statement in the *Bhagavad Gita* which explains (2:62–63):

*Dhyaayato vishayaanpumsah sangasteshoopajaayate;
Sangaat sanjaayate kaamah kaamaatkrodho'bhijaayate.*

When a man thinks of the objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises. (62)

*Krodhaadbhavati sammohah sammohaatsmritivibhramah;
Smritibhramshaad buddhinaasho buddhinaashaatpranashyati.*

From anger comes delusion; from delusion the loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes. (63)

The *Bhagavad Gita* explains the relationship of the individual with the world of objects, and what the association with the object creates within you. It creates a craving, desire, it creates a like. That desire becomes your goal which you try to attain. You struggle and make an effort to attain that desire to fulfil your ambitions and aspirations. When there is difficulty in achieving what you have aspired for, frustration sets in. When frustration sets in, the aggressive nature manifests and then you lose your clarity of mind. This description of the mental state of the individual in relation to the outer world is the most clear description.

When you live in the world, you cannot live without establishing a relationship with the objects of the world; even if you are a renunciate, you also have to live in the world and establish a relationship. When that relationship is established, emotions, hopes, expectations get fused and thoughts are fused with it. With these thoughts comes the colour of expectations, a disease of humanity that no one has ever been able to end. You have expectations from your elders, those younger to you, from your husband, wife, children, friends, acquaintances; you live with expectations from everyone.

When these expectations are not met, you are sad, distressed, disturbed, excited, angry. The mind is confused and this is called stress. When mental states, frustration, restlessness or excitement influence your thoughts and behaviour, the mind is filled with negativity, envy, dislike, disgust, greed. These are considered negative traits. If they enter your life, what will happen to your character, personality and mentality?

When the mind is caught up in external objects, you have to endure the influence of those objects. This becomes the reason for the negative state of mind, and the negative state of life, the distress in your life. According to yoga, if you can recognize the restrictions and limitations of your life and want to make an attempt to find satisfaction, contentment, happiness and peace, you will have to fine-tune your own mental states, behaviours and thoughts, the weeds of your mind. Removing the weeds from the garden of life is the process of yoga. Here yoga begins.

Fine-tuning the mind

If you look at the classical scriptures of yoga, the practice of yoga does not begin with asana or dhyana. In his ashtanga system of yoga, Patanjali defined it clearly: start with yama and niyama. In the *Yoga Sutras* Patanjali defined eight stages of yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. In this sequence, it is clear that the mental modification, the fine-tuning of your personality begins when you start to practise the yamas and niyamas. Health is attained when you practise asanas. Vitality is generated when you practise pranayama. The mind is brought under control when you practise pratyahara. You train your mind to become focused and one-pointed when you practise dharana.

To change the basic quality and nature of the mind, to remove the weeds from the mind, you have to start with the practice of yamas and niyamas which rectify the negative traits of human personality. This is the system of yoga that the seers of the past have seen as a means to learn how to deal with the mind which is interacting with the outer world.

The first method in mind control, is to regulate the material, external relationships and behaviours, for which yoga teaches the yamas. Until these external relationships are regulated, envy, disgust, dislike, desire, anger, crookedness, fraudulence and greed will certainly be expressed in life. Therefore, the concept of fine-tuning is that you are aware of the behaviour of the mind, and slowly try to develop its positive traits.

You are searching for whatever is good in life – and you can bring about the expression of that goodness in life. There is nothing in that search that you can get only externally. When the search is complete, there is satiation – the mind, the heart, the spirit is satiated. Until the search is complete, there is no satiation. Somewhere there is a thought ‘I want to continue this search’. The qualities that you search for and desire in life lie within you, only under the influence of tamas you are not able to express them.

Review of the Day

Where there is talk of love, selfishness enters; where there is talk of learning, selfishness is there; where there is talk of treatment, there too is selfishness. In other words, everyone is inundated with selfishness, and it is this selfishness that troubles everyone. You need to modify this selfishness a little and how do you do that? There is an easy way that you can practise in your daily lives.

Every night, when you go to bed, do something before falling off to sleep and that will be your yoga. Visualize everything that happened to you during the day. What did you do when you woke up in the morning, whose face did you see first, what did you do first, what did you eat for breakfast, what did you drink, who did you talk to and about what, what did you read in the newspaper, what impressed you, what did you ignore? Revisit your day on your mental screen, and contemplate: if the same situation, person, opportunity or event were to occur again, how would you deal with them in a better way.

You have an argument with someone, and you come back home in anger, and that same anger goes to bed with you. You

cannot sleep, and your subconscious mind has to deal with the same anger when you are asleep. You get up the next morning with an angry state of the mind, with the same emotion, for you cannot accept and release it. For good physical or mental health, it is essential that you release it.

You eat food and take the necessary energy from it, and the waste matter is expelled, it doesn't stay inside. If the waste matter stays in the body, then the toxins increase, you will have constipation, indigestion, gas. Therefore, just as it is necessary to expel poisonous matter from the body, in the same way it is necessary to expel the negative elements from the mind. The emotion with which you go to sleep, the thought and situation that you carry with you, is breeding a special tension in your subconscious mind: it is breeding stress.

It is also related to your work-efficiency, as it beats your mental and intellectual talent. When you revisit the events of the day at night, you can learn from them, namely that there could have been another way of dealing with the same situation. If you can do this every day, for one month, two months, three months, you will see that there is change in your thinking, behaviour and responses. This is called yoga.

Science of life

In India too people have begun to consider yoga a physical science only. This is wrong. Yoga is not a physical science, it is a life science, it is a way to excel in life. Therefore, do not think that meditation, doing asanas and thinking good thought is yoga. No. These can be different parts of yoga, the same way that your body is made up of different nerves and cells. Which one of them is important, which is secondary? None. Whatever part causes sickness becomes important. If you have an upset stomach, then you treat that, and that is what is important to you. If your mind is upset, you treat your mind, and that becomes important to you. Whichever part of the body is diseased becomes important for you. There is nothing like primary, secondary; everything has its own function.

If you see yoga as a life science, then asanas play a small part in it. One-tenth of yoga is asana, not more, and five percent is pranayama. Yoga is an immensely vast science, which can influence every dimension of the personality. Therefore, if at night before going to sleep, you try to remove stress and anger from your mind, then that too is an exercise of yoga. You have to believe in it. If we are able to remove despondency and tension, we are yogis. Until we are able to do so, we are bhogis with our happiness, sadness, likes, dislikes, disgust, greed – everything is there. Therefore, at night, all of you do an analysis of your day; analyze every interaction that you had, your every behaviour. Watch as you watch a movie on a screen, the same way, objectively. Observe the events that happened to you during the day and try to find a better way to deal with that situation or event the next time it happens in your life. The next time it happens to you, if you remember, your responses will be different and you will be less affected by the stresses, pains, sufferings, dissatisfactions and frustrations.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda has always said, especially to his sannnyasins, that there are no simple solutions in life, only intelligent choices. There are never any easy solutions, yet for anything in the world there are various possibilities from which you have to choose one. That possibility should be proper and befitting for you, and to search for it you have to remain aware. You can bring this awareness into your life through meditation.

The process which takes you towards salvation is not meditation, yet the process that can make you aware of yourself is. Meditation begins from awareness of yourself. How do you become aware of yourself? You should know what you did, you should know whatever you are doing, you should have control over what you want to do. You can achieve this condition through the practice of the review of the day, your self-analysis. From there you achieve fine-tuning of yourself. When you begin to analyze and see your reactions, you also spot your weaknesses.

SWAN analysis

You have to realize, that you, in one way or the other, express your strengths and weaknesses in life. You follow principles and these principles govern your life, moment to moment. What are these principles? Strength governs and controls your life, weaknesses, ambitions and needs control your life. Strength and weakness are together, for one weakness can be overcome by cultivating an appropriate strength and quality. Often you ignore the strength and identify with the weakness, and when you identify with the weakness you do not know how to respond or act since you have identified with the weaker component of your nature, not the stronger component of your personality.

Similarly, needs and ambitions go hand in hand for many a time, you confuse your ambition to be your need, and your need to be your ambition. When there is no discrimination between the two, you do not know how to prioritize your life. Sometimes, you are chasing your ambition, thinking it to be your need, and sometimes, ignoring your ambition, thinking it is not a need. There has to be proper cultivation of wisdom which will happen in this meditative process analyzing your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs and observing yourself interacting and responding in normal situations.

You are the person who has to face the environment of society and deal with every situation. Therefore, it is important that you devote ten minutes to this practice of self-observation and modification of your mental behaviour. This is the beginning of your yogic journey, which leads you to cultivating the positive qualities of life.

Plant the right seeds

For this reason, be a farmer, plant and protect the right seeds. You have to develop the courage to live your life the way you want to, with conviction, faith and strength. The system of yoga provides you with these opportunities. If you are able to understand and adopt yoga in your life routine, definitely the human personality will be transformed. There is no doubt about it, yet you have to have that attitude and bent of mind

in which you are able to realize and balance the material and internal dimension at the same time. You need to have that particular aspiration.

Begin your yoga at night by observing the events of the day, try to be aware of the decisions and thoughts that come to you at night when you are thinking about the situations. In this way, the quality of your mind will change. It will become more creative, positive, optimistic. It is the optimistic positive mind which progresses, not the pessimistic restrictive mind. If you can control your desires, the superior qualities of life manifest in your behaviour and thoughts, and society will be inspired by those. This is the teaching of yoga.

Stress Management through Yoga and Meditation

6 August 2005, FICCI Auditorium, Delhi (Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries)

It gives me immense pleasure to be with you for the purpose of discussing yoga, and more specifically stress management through yoga and meditation. How can you help yourself manage stress? Until you understand what yoga is, you will not be able to realize the efficiency of yoga in managing the stress of life.

Improving character and health

The concept and understanding of yoga should be clear. The first component of yoga deals with the improvement of human character, behaviour, thinking and performance. This aspect is covered by the components of yamas and niyamas according to Patanjali. The second component of yoga is the attainment of physical wellbeing, health or *swasthya*. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the concept of health is wholistic health and not just the absence of disease. Health is the management of disease, the right, timely intervention which leads to the attainment of health. The WHO has defined health as physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual. Until you achieve completely this wholistic health you cannot be considered healthy.

From the perspective of yoga everyone is sick – some emotionally, some morally, others spiritually. It is due to sickness that people come to yoga. A hospital is not a place for healthy people. It is for the sick. A yoga centre is not a place

for healthy people, but a place for the sick. Wholistic, physical, mental, emotional, moral, psychic and spiritual health is a state of wellbeing in life in which you are able to move the energies inherent in your body. When the energies in the body become active, the body experiences absolute health and wellbeing, which fulfils the purpose of asanas and pranayamas.

Refining the nature of the mind

The third component of yoga is learning how to discipline the mind. Nowhere can one obtain the training in how to control and harmonize the mind but this should be the form of education. Materialist education caters to only one aspect of human life. The second aspect of education is internal education, learning to discipline yourself, to make an effort in life to be forbearing, and moving towards refinement in life. It is through education that you can refine yourself. When all performances are refined in the life of a person, they become cultured. This culture and its manifestation at all levels in life gives wholistic creative expression. And the wholistic expression of human aspirations represents the drive to attain mental peace, self-control and direction through the practices of pratyahara and dharana.

You need the ability to govern, and become friends with the mind. There are four wild horses in your mind: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. On the first day with your first effort you want to make your mind calm and steady. When these four do not calm down, you start fighting with them, you apply force. In the end you say that after so many years of effort you have not been able to focus, but if you practise yoga sadhana in an appropriate way, the attainment in your life will be perceptible to others.

People have been meditating for thirty years and are still unable to restrain their mental excitement. What is the benefit of thirty years of meditation if you are unable to restrain mental stimulations? If you practise with a clear mind, the attainment of your life becomes an inspiration to others.

You keep struggling with yourself, telling the mind to become silent, settle down, concentrate, not be dissipated

and destructive, focus on the breath. Daily you are having a wrestling match with your mind. Is meditation wrestling? Through training in the practices of pratyahara and dharana you are able to steady and stabilize these four aspects of the mind and reorient your behaviour. After that the spiritual dimension of life begins.

Patanjali has explained the fourth dimension of yoga as *dhyana* or meditation and samadhi. You are looking at the four different aspects of yoga: behavioural, physical, mental and spiritual. Meditation is a state of mind, not a practice. In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali refers to six sadhanas and two stages. Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana are the six sadhana aspects of raja yoga. Dhyana and samadhi are the two stages or attainments of mind, which you obtain after having perfected the first six sadhanas. Meditation is something you have to experience. It is a state of mind – an altered state of mind. In this process of meditation, you start the retraining and re-education of the normal outer behaviour.

The journey into meditation: relaxation

The journey begins with pratyahara which is the first step of mind discipline. Here the first item is relaxation, not meditation or concentration but learning how to relax. Until relaxation takes place you cannot attain any form of concentration or meditation. Graded or deepening relaxation, is the ability to relax stress and tension from your life, body, mind and personality. This is a trick, for the interaction an individual has in this world happens due to the mind and so this mind has to be managed.

The practice of relaxation is the first technique of pratyahara. Yoga nidra was experimented upon by my guru, Swami Satyananda, in the early 1940s when he was in Swami Sivananda's ashram in Rishikesh. Then, in the early 1960s I became the first guinea pig to put myself through the experiences of yoga nidra and I can tell you that it works at the level of the nervous system, the muscular system, the brain and mind.

With the practice of yoga nidra there is relief of muscular tension and mental relaxation is achieved. The second point is that you are able to release tension from the nerves which are high strung, and you are able to find peace. The third point is relief of cerebral tension and mental fatigue which is related to the nervous system.

There is a definite connection between the brain and nervous system, the sympathetic and parasympathetic, the sensory and motor system. When these four systems are highly strung it impacts the performance of the brain. There is an effect of stress and you have experienced it in your life. Nervous tension causes disruption in the brain circuits and when they fuse the mind shuts down, and does not want to talk with anybody, does not want to be stimulated; it just wants to relax.

Emotional and mental tension occur. A human being cannot live life without tension, however, the bowstring should be stretched just enough that the arrow can be released. Do not stretch it too much so that the arrow releases itself and stress becomes distress. Also it should not be too loose, or one cannot position the arrow on the string. The appropriate tension needs to be maintained.

Do not believe that you will ever be free from stress and tension. The subject is not eradication of tension but management of tension; that is the learning. Management of tension happens with the right practice of yoga and meditation, which begins with relaxation.

The journey into meditation: observation

In your life you experience stress in the muscular, nervous, emotional and mental areas. Nervous tension, muscular tension, emotional tension and mental tension are the four types of tension that you face. You encounter this stress mainly due to the inability to maintain internal restraint. Stress is the outcome of the absence of restraint in your life. What is restraint or *samyama*?

Sam means total and *yama* means conduct. *Samyama* means appropriate, equitable and righteous conduct. This appropriate conduct happens in meditation as a vision and

if it is not appropriate, then difficulties and stress begin in your life. These days, you can observe stress and difficulties at any moment in anyone's life. The first practice of meditation after relaxation is developing the capacity of observation.

Many years ago I became aware of the possibilities of the human mind when I witnessed an experiment performed in San Francisco. A person, a total stranger, was put into hypnosis in a big auditorium. In the state of hypnosis, he was asked how many pillars and windows were in the hall. He gave the complete and correct description of the room in the state of hypnosis. When he was asked the same question out of hypnosis, in the normal state, he did not know. The mind is like a radar, it picks up everything that comes in its range. When you entered this room, your mind picked up how many tubelights there are, how many fire extinguishers and pictures are on the wall. It knows everything. It is in the unconscious and you are not able to extract that information at the conscious level. In another state of mind, like hypnosis, you are able to access that information which is accurate and true. In the normal state you have to count and verify.

This shows the possibilities of the human mind. It indicates how sensitive and receptive the human mind is. This human mind is not functioning creatively, for you lack awareness and the ability of observation. Therefore, after relaxation, the second component of meditation is to develop the ability to observe yourself, and expand your awareness. Develop observation, evolve your awareness, and prepare the ground for higher practices of concentration, visualization and meditation.

The process of developing awareness and the faculty of observation comes with the practice of *antar mouna*, which is also a practice of *pratyahara*. In the beginning stage of this mind discipline, one becomes aware and recognizes the information that the senses are receiving through the eyes, ears, by touch, smell and taste, and develops a uniform version of these sensorial experiences.

The next step is to observe your thoughts objectively. *Antar mouna* means inner silence. *Antar mouna* stops the mental chatter. With this practice you are able to become aware of the

internal expressions in the form of thoughts, ideas, desires and expectations, and you learn how to manage and modify them according to your need.

The journey into meditation: focus

The third stage is learning how to focus the mind. For this there is the practice of ajapa japa where you combine awareness with mantra. Using breath and mantra helps you to focus the mind and to isolate the mind from destructive dissipations of the environment. In this manner, gradually you go through the process of mental training and mental education. In yoga this is known as the preparation for meditation, the journey from pratyahara to dharana. This is the basic way to prepare the mind.

When you begin the process of meditation, three components are involved.

1. 'I', the subject or the meditator
2. The goal of meditation that I want to attain
3. The process of meditation which will take me to attain the goal.

As you progress in the practice the process slowly drops away, for it becomes a natural process, a spontaneous effort. Meditation simplifies from threefold to twofold where only the practitioner and the goal remain. This progresses further and duality vanishes. The practitioner vanishes and only the goal of meditation remains. The state of dhyana is a progression which starts with threefold awareness proceeds to dual awareness and ends with unitary awareness. This is the philosophy of meditation, of making the mind one-pointed.

What is your priority?

Looking at the philosophy – with its goal, observer and process – there is no question of failure in the practice. However, when you look at yourself and the goal and yet do not know the process, then you try a little bit of this and a little bit of that. It is like digging one-hundred holes one foot deep in search of water – and you do not find any water.

Every practice has its own goal, and purpose. A blind man wishes to see the sun, yet this cannot be the priority. The priority in his life is to get his eyesight and the day he has eyesight, he will be able to see the entire creation, not just the sun. Similarly, God-realization, self-realization, liberation or samadhi can be a thought in your mind, but not the priority. The priority of your life is to prepare yourself so that you can experience everything.

The practice of yoga becomes the medium to develop the quality of the mind; this requires a change in the mind. You need to change your habits. If you remove 'h' it becomes 'a bit', if you remove 'a', 'bit' remains, if you remove 'b', 'it' remains and if 'i' is removed, 't' remains, and tea is addictive. Habit is a conditioning of the mind. You get these habits from your society, family, education, culture, religious indoctrination – with the passage of time they become stronger.

As you become mature in life, it becomes harder to change the basic character in life. While attempting to practise yoga as a technique, live yoga in your life and that will make the whole difference. Do not confine yourself to your yoga practice for one hour in the morning or evening whenever you are free. Try to carry a yogic attitude with you during the whole day. The yogic attitudes are: relaxation, awareness, observation and focus.

Competency in performance of a yoga posture or any other yoga practice does not mean that you are a yoga practitioner. People in a circus do better asanas than anybody here. When a person who cannot sweep his own room, make his own bed or clean his own toilet dreams of becoming a karma yogi, it is sheer nonsense. With this type of contradiction then what could be the goal of your life?

What are you searching for in your life with so much contradiction? What are you looking for? You have to be sure that your efforts give the result that will uplift the quality of your life. Yoga should not become a one-hour practice, but part and parcel of your life from moment to moment. For that, cultivation of yogic attitudes is of prime importance for yoga teaches you to be a farmer in life and not a warrior.

People say to live life like a warrior, to be like Arjuna. I do not subscribe to that. A warrior wins a victory by shedding the blood of others and killing others. There is no peace in such a victory. Therefore, do not struggle with yourself, for by doing so you are killing yourself. Instead look at your life as a garden and try to plant beautiful flowers that reflect your inherent qualities. Awaken the pure disposition of your nature and stop struggling with the negative attributes of life. Do not say that there is no hope in life. This life is a boon. It is your good luck to be the recipient of this life. You can make an effort to fulfil the four goals of life: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha* or material, emotional, ethical and spiritual wellbeing. Then the goal of liberation can be fulfilled. Therefore, you should seriously contemplate how to make yoga a part of your lifestyle and not just a practice.

Converting tension to contemplation

The question of tension is a never-ending story. There is nobody more qualified than me to answer this question, for people come to me with all their life's tensions: tension that the child is restless, tension that the child is silent, tension that the child does not study, tension that the child is a book worm, tension that the daughter is not yet married, tension that the son or daughter cannot beget a child, tension after the birth of a child. When is a human being free of tension? There is tension if you become free of tension, and there is tension if you are not free of tension. This tension becomes the cause of difficulties as you are unable to convert tension into contemplation. When tension becomes contemplative, there is a dynamic, creative turning point in life.

You have to accept the reality that in life the doors of happiness and the doors of suffering exist. When a door of happiness closes you stand in front of that door for so long that you are unaware that another door of happiness has opened. You simply ignore it. While looking at the closed door you keep saying, 'The door is closed. It is the end of happiness; unhappiness is coming'. If you turned around and looked the other way, you would see another gateway to

happiness, yet you keep observing the closed door and you are unhappy.

Do you believe that there is something to attain in life? One goal of life which I am sure you do accept is that a person should be capable of standing on his own two feet. Yoga and meditation become the source of this inspiration and when you adopt it in your life, then the tension which becomes stress can be changed by adopting a yogic lifestyle. So as a last point, I am giving you two practices to be done daily to become free from tension.

Practice 1: before sleep

When you go to bed at night, lie with feet apart, palms facing upward, head straight, and close your eyes.

In that lying posture visualize the right leg. See each and every part of the right leg and relax the right leg.

Visualize the left leg, and see each and every part of the left leg, and relax it. Visualize the right arm, relax it.

Visualize the left arm, relax it.

Visualize the trunk, the back, the chest, the neck, the head and relax every part.

It will take you five minutes to connect with the body and be aware of each and every part of the body in your visualization. In these five minutes you will experience a deep muscular and nervous relaxation, and a very pleasant state of mind in which you are neither stressed out nor tired.

After those five minutes, begin to observe the breath and watch the abdomen going up and down with the incoming and outgoing breath.

In the structure of the lungs the air sacs called alveoli contained in the lower half of the lungs, are where the oxygen and gases are separated from the normal air; the oxygen mixes with the blood and goes to the heart. Here in the lower part of the lungs, when you exhale the toxic matter of the body, the carbon, comes out. Therefore, abdominal

breathing is given much importance in yoga. Science today has substantiated the fact that abdominal breathing has to take place for the absorption of oxygen and elimination of toxins.

So, after going through the visualization of the different parts of the body, you watch the rise and fall of the abdomen. Gradually when there is the rhythm and harmonious movement in the rise and fall of the stomach, you start counting the breath.

Inhalation and exhalation is to be counted as one breath. In this way you count your breath back from 100 to 1.

If your awareness slips and you forget the count, then again start from 100 and come back with total awareness. This practice of relaxation will release the stresses and give you good sleep at night.

Practice 2: on waking

When you sleep at night and are not able to release your tension, the tension continues to affect the subconscious and unconscious. When you wake up in the morning the tension is still there. And you have developed the habit that when you get up in the morning, tension starts with the loud ringing of the alarm. When you wake up from sleep to the screechy sound of the alarm, the mind also goes screechy.

Are you in a positive frame of mind early in the morning? You read the newspaper: a murder somewhere, of dacoits somewhere, a theft somewhere, some fraud and cheating. You think that you wake up with a calm mind and these types of thought arise: first the loud sound of the alarm and then you read the newspaper and are filled with negative thoughts. The events have an influence on the calm mind which has just woken up after the night's rest. Therefore, the start of the day itself is wrong. Why don't you read the newspaper ten minutes after you read the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Ramayana* for five minutes? Then you will be in the right frame of mind – or simply practise two mantras to ensure that your day begins in the right manner.

Today there are alarm clocks with the sound of *Om Namah Shivaya*. Why not use them and be in a pleasant frame of mind rather than waking up to a loud screechy sound? Wake up with mantra and then chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times. This is the mantra of healing. After that, practise the Gayatri mantra which is for creativity, wisdom and the development of understanding and a positive perspective in life. If you begin your day with these two mantras eleven times each, in only one week you will notice a difference in the ability, quality, behaviour and character of your mind.

When your day begins with a positive and energetic frame of mind, what could be better than that? You can modify and fine-tune your life in a definite way and see your life blossom so that at the end of your life you do not feel that it was barren like fallow land. So do give yoga an opportunity in your life.

Developing Creative Faculties

7 August 2005, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Delhi

The entire process of developing the creative nature is inherent in the process and practice of yoga. What do you mean by creative nature and creativity? What does the word 'creative' indicate? Is creativity only related to one's performance in life or is it related to the personality, character and behaviour of the individual?

I tend to look at the concept of creativity in a wholistic sense, not just restricted to performance, activity or other forms of mental or physical expression. Creativity represents the culture, *sanskriti*. *Samyak kritania iti sanskriti*, when all your performances happen in the appropriate manner, that is known as culture, *sanskriti*. If what is being expressed is done in a balanced, harmonious manner, and the results are positive, uplifting, satisfying and fulfilling, then that is the ultimate creativity that one can express in life.

To develop the ability to express your creative nature, you have to train yourself. Apart from yoga philosophy, theories and practices, there has to be an inspiration, a motive and a drive to attain excellence in life. You begin to live yoga when the idea of attaining excellence comes. That is the beginning of a journey that you undertake to rediscover the efficiency and creativity of the body, mind, senses, intellect, emotions and spirit. Therefore, creativity is the ultimate flowering of the human personality and nature. When the potentials of the human nature come to a peak, that is creativity. How do we develop our potentials to this peak?

Bhakti yoga

Bhakti yoga does not mean the yoga of contemplation and devotion. This is a most misunderstood concept. Bhakti represents a state of inner psychological and emotional transformation. Just as raja yoga has eight steps, known as *ashtanga yoga*, bhakti yoga has nine steps, known as *navanga yoga*.

Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita* enumerates the characteristics of a *bhakta*, one who is established in the righteous nature. Devotion does not mean that you cry in front of your ishta devata, or you offer worship and *pooja*; bhakti is a process of inner transformation. Sri Krishna indicates in eight verses the type of personality and character that a bhakta needs to have (12:13–20):

*Adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankaarah samadukhasukhah kshamee.*

One who looks upon all beings without duality, who is friendly and compassionate to all; who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving. (13)

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayah;
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with the mind and intellect dedicated to me, such a devotee of mine is dear to Me. (14)

*Yasmaannodvijate loko lokaannodvijate cha yah;
Harshaamarshabhayodvegairmukto yah sa cha me priyah.*

One by whom people are not disturbed, who is not disturbed by people, and who is free from delight, anger, fear and agitation is dear to Me. (15)

*Anapekshah shuchirdaksha udaaseeno gatavyathah;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee yo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

One who expects nothing from anyone, who is pure, impartial, devoid of agonies, and who renounces the

feeling of doership in all undertakings that bhakta is dear to Me. (16)

*Yo na hrishyati na dweshti na shochati na kaangkshati;
Shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaan yah sa me priyah.*

Who does not rejoice, does not hate, does not grieve, does not desire; that man, who renounces the good and bad effects of his karma, full of bhakti, is dear to Me. (17)

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhadukheshu samah sangavivarjitah.*

Mentally balanced towards friends and enemies, likewise in honour and in dishonour, in heat and in cold, in pleasure and in pain, and free from association with worldly objects – unto whom praise and reproach are alike. (18)

*Tulyanindaastutirmaunee santushto yena kenachit:
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaan me priyo narah.*

Who is silent, content with whatever he has, without attachment to home, steady minded, full of devotion, that man is dear to me. (19)

*Ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate;
Shraddadhaanaa matparamaa bhaktaaste'teeva me priyaah.*

Who follow this immortal dharma as declared, endowed with faith, regarding Me as their supreme goal, those devotees are exceedingly dear to Me. (20)

These eight verses describe the characteristics of a bhakta, a devotee who has attained perfection and excellence in life, able to control and manage passions, emotions and feelings. The devotee is totally balanced in pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering, prestige and abuse, heat and cold, is silent, content and humble. These are the characteristics of a bhakta defined by Sri Krishna. These characteristics represent a state of mind that one can attain through the process of yoga.

This is a clear indication that bhakti is not only adoration but a process of self-transformation in which you are able to manage your extreme behaviours.

Live with truth

The first stage of navanga bhakti yoga is keeping company with positive, pious, good people and shunning the company of those who are negative and bad: *Prathama bhagati santanha kara sangaa* (*Ramacharitamanas*, Aranyakand, 34/8a). Sri Rama is defining the process of bhakti for Shabari, the tribal woman. He says there are nine forms or stages of bhakti, and the first stage is identification with truth. We interpret 'satsang' as association with truth. Satsang does not mean gossiping or giving a talk. *Satsang* means having the experience of truth in your life, living in the proximity of truth.

Sri Rama also clarified the difference between a good and a bad person: *Bhicchurata eka praana hari lehi, milita eka duhkha daaruna dehi* (*Ramacharitamanas*, Balakand, 4/4). The pious are those who 'take away your heart and mind upon separation'. It means there is so much identification and oneness with them that you feel, 'We are two bodies but with one mind and one spirit'. The crooked, by contrast, are those who bring suffering and pain, who can influence you and make you weak due to negative thinking, behaviour and attitudes.

How do you associate with truth in life? The only way to associate with truth is that you learn to remove the different masks that you put on in the course of your life. These masks represent how you wish to present yourself to other people. They hide the natural self and present outwardly a self that is subject to the influences of ego, passions, greed and desires. When passions or greed come up you are putting on a mask, when you put on that mask your entire behaviour changes. When you are subject to and experience envy, greed or frustration that state is overpowering and is what you reflect outside. Is that what you wish to be? No. So what is the solution? Learn how to drop these masks which alter your behaviour, character, knowledge, passions, intellect, intelligence and intuition.

How do you fulfil this first requirement of bhakti? To learn how to remove the mask you have to learn how to meditate. This is the crucial theme of yoga that you have to understand. Just knowing and practising asana and pranayama does not make you a yogi but the attempt you put in to improve yourself and attain excellence in life is what makes you a yogi.

Bhakti has to be understood as a process of psychological transformation and not a *karmakand*, a ritual. Meditation becomes the primary practice when you want to drop the different masks you wear and realize your true nature.

Identify with the divine

The second form of bhakti is enjoying stories about divinity: *Doosari rati mama kathaa prasangaa*. (*Ramacharitamanas*, Aranyakand, 34/8b)

This does not mean that you should be engrossed in reading the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita* throughout life. People read these books a hundred times but is a leaning towards that ideal formed in the mind of the reader? You are not able to bring about a corresponding change in yourself. A *katha*, story, is not a means of entertainment or a bedtime story. What you are listening to and absorbing gives birth to a sattwic feeling in your mind. Identifying with, adopting and incorporating the positive, divine qualities in your life is the purpose of the second stage.

When you like something, you wish to possess, adopt and use it. The second part of bhakti yoga means that whatever good you desire for yourself be attracted to it all the time, keep it as the focus of your life at all times. It is difficult to keep the mind focused and have clarity of mind. How can you keep your focus on something you desire and aspire for? You have to cultivate uplifting thoughts and ideas, overcome the negative traits and tendencies of the gross mind, and identify with positive qualities and strengths. When you identify with strength and quality then your mind becomes positive.

Humility

The third form of bhakti is humility – *tisari bhagati amaan, Guru pada pankaj sevaa*. (Ramacharitamanas, Aranyakand, 35a) Humility is learning how to manage your ego, aggression, self-image. You recognize that you are a simple, innocent individual trapped in the devious world. The world is samsara, *samsarati iti samsarah* – like a snake crawling on its stomach, the world moves on the power of the stomach.

To become humble and egoless you have to adjust to the world, not identify with the world. Identification with the world is saying, 'I am the doer, I am the enjoyer'. As long as you have the identity, conviction, belief and thought that 'I am the doer, I am the enjoyer', you are subject to the plays of the ego, to mental behaviours and natures. The moment the conviction comes to you, 'I am only an actor – just as the harmonium cannot play itself but needs somebody to play it,' the individual is guided by a force, a hidden power. Your life is guided by what you desire, think, aspire for and your ideas. Your life is guided by your mind, your body is guided by your mind and that mind is guided by something else which is more subtle.

That subtle thing is hidden and too far away for you to grasp. What understanding or experience do you have of your mind? You can infer that it exists for you encounter certain behaviours and expressions in life that are generated from inside the head. When you are aware of thoughts, you know it is a function, an activity of the mind. When you observe your desires you know it is a function, an activity of the mind. When you become aware of your likes and dislikes you know these are expressions of your mind. The awareness of mind comes only when you are aware of your mental behaviour.

When you are aware of the thought process the existence of those thoughts become clear. When the vrittis, the awareness, the consciousness becomes extroverted you are not aware of the thoughts. When the mind is still, one-pointed and merges into itself, then you are able to understand and identify the internal processes. You have to sit still and become introverted to experience the mind. The awareness

has to be diverted from external objects towards the internal thought patterns.

You have not yet had a glimpse of what is beyond the mind yet controls the mind, ego, intellect and chitta. This Controller is beyond the experience of the mind. The ego can only be subdued through humility, and this glimpse of the Controller is attained after being freed from the bondages of the ego.

Reflecting on the states of the mind does bring about a change, as effort is necessary to become humble through *dhyana*, meditation. And there is a process of yoga known as bhakti yoga responsible for the internal transformation of the individual. This idea of bhakti yoga is in accordance with the idea presented by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* and by Sri Rama in the *Ramayana*. Bhakti yoga allows the creative potentials to develop. Individual creativity is the right application of the faculties and qualities of head, heart and hands that one is equipped with. You have an intellect, you have emotions – life is nothing but an expression of head, heart and hands, *buddhi*, *bhavana* and *karma*, intellect, emotion and action.

Planning good actions

Every year in Rikhia during the Sat Chandi Mahayajna, prasad is distributed to every family with good wishes for their prosperity, peace and happiness. That prasad is not in the form of sweets but it is substantial: grains, clothes, utensils, all necessary requirements are provided. Throughout the year we have to plan how to organize it in the best way.

Once a sannyasin thought, ‘If Guruji can do this work, we can also do it in our region’. They loaded one thousand blankets onto a truck and travelled to the Kalahandi district of Orissa. They thought they would do seva in the most disciplined and organized way, yet the truck did not even reach the village. As they were approaching, a mob of villagers, having received the news that blankets were arriving, came running in their direction. So the truck turned around and took off in the opposite direction with the crowd behind them running. In the end the blankets were thrown out of the moving vehicle and it sped off. That is not the way.

Swami Satyananda repeatedly says that you will think one hundred times in one hundred different ways about how to perform negative actions. Why do you not use your head for positive actions so that excellence can be achieved? Why are you hasty? You can plan carefully negative acts towards others, yet acting for somebody's welfare is done indifferently, giving the responsibility to others and vanishing.

There should be a purpose behind the action, organization and planning with hard work involved. More effort is needed for positive acts than for negative acts to achieve excellence. This is your greatest defect that you are not inspired or motivated towards good acts; you have the desire without knowing the way. While desiring to be creative and positive you are not able to mould your thoughts, behaviour and actions in that pattern.

To attain the creative abilities of life, effort has to be made on the mental level for good qualities to take birth. When virtues or *satguna* appear in your life and you are able tread the path as instructed by the wise, an effort has to be made to attain an inner psychological change. Only then are you able to progress.

I give you an example from my own life. When I came to the ashram I had a serious problem – and that was sleep. In 24 hours I could sleep for 28 hours. I would be in such a deep slumber that my guru brothers would pick up my cot while I was sleeping and leave it outside the ashram gate and I remained fast asleep there. I missed Guruji's classes many times. This used to hurt me a lot and I kept saying to myself, 'From tomorrow I will wake up at 3.00 am'. I was not able to do so. I went to my Guruji. He said, "You are making too great an effort, make a small effort. Reduce your sleep by five minutes every week." If I woke up by 5.00 am, then next week I would wake at 4.55 am. The next week 4.50 am. The third week 4.45 am. Continuing in this way after a few years I had the capacity to be in control with ease. If I had just tried to wake up by 3.00 am, I would have been struggling with myself until today as I wanted to take a step that was not in accordance with the conditioning of my mind. Guruji showed

a way to change the conditioning of the mind – through *anuvrat* or a small vow. You can also start your journey by a small vow.

Creative potential

There are the three components of life. If there is no buddhi but bhavana and karma, life is derailed. If there is no bhavana but buddhi and karma, life is derailed. If there is no karma only buddhi and bhavana, life is derailed. For life to be on track you need to have the three functioning optimally and in synchronicity with each other. Synchronization of head, heart and hands becomes the way to attain creativity. Creativity is the peak of human efficiency which is attained when the mind is positive and not clouded.

To experience bhakti yoga you have to practise meditation. Bhakti allows the creative potential to unfold. What is the yogic view of the creative potential and what is the commonsense view of the creative potential? Creative potential is the best, the good that you desire for yourself.

The restrictive natures are those that trouble you and restrict your performance and expression. When your performance and expressions are restricted by the nature of the mind, intellect, emotions, desires and ambitions, then there is strife and withdrawal. Frustration and depression indicate withdrawal of a person's creativity and optimism. In the state of depression, a person completely withdraws and does not see a glimmer of hope in the environment, the current situations, or life.

Why have you withdrawn? Why are you experiencing frustration or depression? The answer is simple: you have identified with the restrictive and negative nature of yourself. You identify with the tamasic nature and beyond that nothing is perceived. With this mental state of depression and frustration, virtues depart from your life. With the departure of virtues, you lose balance and control over yourself.

Another way to develop and cultivate creativity in life, apart from meditation, self-observation and reflection, is to develop virtues. Virtues become the trigger points for the full

expression of the creative human nature. Swami Sivananda realized this; it is for this purpose that today we propagate the Sivananda Yoga.

The raja yoga of Patanjali teaches you how to attain this control over yourself. It prepares the ground, plants the right seeds, nurtures them and brings them forth in the form of flowers and fruits. Swami Sivananda has gone one step further. He said you have a garden which is your life, you have planted the seeds of flowers and fruits. You have perfected your yoga, you have planted the seeds of yama and niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. You have come to a point of perfection and attainment where the seeds have become a tree full of flowers and fruits. Then what? Do the fruits and flowers dry up on the tree or do you distribute them in the market? Taking and distributing the flowers and fruits in the market for the pleasure of others is the yoga of Sivananda. So there is a clear distinction between the yoga of Patanjali and Swami Sivananda.

The development of the garden, the flowers and fruits of the tree is the extent of Patanjali. The fruit is samadhi, the flower is dhyana, however, then you have to share it, and the yoga of Sivananda begins from this point. Where the yoga of Patanjali ends the yoga of Sivananda begins, distributing and sharing. How does one market the attainments of spiritual life? Swami Sivananda says through service, love, the ability to give, by maintaining the purity of heart and mind, identifying with the good, doing the appropriate and the righteous action, and then again by meditating and realizing the selfless nature, which you have experienced after marketing the fruits of samadhi and the flowers of dhyana.

Service becomes the medium for Swami Sivananda to express the creative energy and attainments of yoga. Seva has to be properly understood. Swami Satyananda says that people plan minutely their negative, wrong actions. Similarly, people need to be clear on their goals, put in a steady effort, plan their seva, their good actions and then people will experience goodness and the ability to be good, and do good deeds and actions.

Question and Answer

7 August 2005, Chinmaya Mission, Delhi

What is the importance of mantra diksha in life?

Mantras are sounds, vibrations, waves which ancient rishis and munis heard while in the state of meditation. When they received the impressions of these mantras in meditation there existed no such thing as organized religion. There was no Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta, Christianity or Islam.

These wise ones heard these sounds in higher states of meditation and recognized their power, describing it as *Mananaat trayate iti mantraha* – that which can liberate the mind from its shackles of anxiety and worry, this energy and power is called mantra. The mind always takes hold of one thought and goes round and round in circles. *Mananaat trayate iti mantraha* is freeing the mind from this obsession of going round in circles, freeing it from the shackles of its obsessive nature. This was the definition the wise gave.

Along with this definition, they related these vibrations, sounds and waves to chakras situated in the body. When you see the pictorial representation of these chakras as lotuses, you see written on their petals different letters which are the mantras for these particular chakras. Therefore, in yoga the definitions given of mantras and beliefs regarding those mantras are not religious beliefs.

When the rishis heard these vibrations, there was no organized religion. The rishis heard *Om Namah Shivaya*. Today in religious tradition it is taken as a Shaiva mantra. The rishis heard *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, today on the

strength of religious tradition, it is taken as a Krishna mantra by the Vaishnava sect. Yet it was before the birth of Rama and Krishna that the rishis heard these mantras, so how can one relate them to Sri Rama and Sri Krishna? Mantras are not the names of any individual or any concrete form or idol of any god.

Mantras are the means to awaken different internal energies and radiances in the human body. You have to understand mantras in this way. When you say *Om Namah Shivaya*, and look at your subtle body, where the chakras are, then the mantra *Om* is the switch for ajna chakra. By chanting *Om* ajna chakra is activated. In the same way, the five letters *Na, Ma, Shi, Va, Ya* are all mantras or bija mantras for different chakras. *Ya* is related to the bija mantra for anahata chakra – *Yam*, and to *Vam*, the bija mantra of swadhisthana chakra. They are sounds and vibrations of different chakras. This has been the belief of yoga since the beginning. Religions came much later and incarnations, *avatars*, came even later.

There are various types of mantra. One mantra is the aradhana mantra of your religious tradition and you do the japa of this mantra in your aradhana, worship, and pooja of your ishta devata. Another mantra is the shanti mantra, which has a calming effect on the mind and its restless nature. One of the shanti mantras is *So Ham*. Kabirdas describes it by saying:

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai,
Soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahase ikkisau jaap,
Anahada upaje apai aapa.*

Immerse your mind in the mantra and do the mantra japa in such a way that your mind just goes on chanting *So Ham*. 21,600 is the number of breaths you take in twenty-four hours. Kabirdas is talking about *So Ham* as a shanti mantra from the point of aradhana. In this way, aradhana mantras, shanti mantras and yoga mantras came about. Yoga mantras are chanted for a person's spiritual upliftment and progress.

What is diksha?

The word 'diksha' comes from the Sanskrit root *drig*, meaning 'to see'. *Diksha* means to adopt a new vision. In English, diksha is translated as 'initiation'. In Hindi, it means to imbibe a new vision, a new *sankalpa* or resolve, a new motive or intention. Diksha is giving a new way of looking at things which will help you to live well and prove fruitful for your wellbeing.

To understand the importance of diksha in your life, you have to come back to mannan. There are two connotations of *mannan*: one is to reflect on something, and the other is the negative form or the obsessive thinking, when one thought constantly goes on and on and you cannot free yourself of it. That mannan percolates into your mind and becomes an obsession and worry. For example, your son is ill. You know he is ill and you have to get him treated so he becomes healthy. If you simply go on and on thinking the entire day about him being ill, it is not going to make him healthy. Is his illness going to be cured by you worrying? Medicine is the remedy, not worry. You become so distressed and troubled due to worrying that you lose your cool as well as your intellect.

By obsessive thinking your existence is plastered over with negativity and this is what the mantra frees you from. What is the result of this? Your mental clarity stays intact, you can take quick decisions, you have a quick understanding of situations and people and you connect with your own inner strength and confidence. This is the most important thing.

When no friend, no relative, no companion remains in the world, then it is the mantra that remains and gives you strength. A mantra will never allow even the shadow of loneliness to enter your life. On the contrary, it makes your life worthy, it removes inner fatigue and distress. Therefore, you must accept mantra sadhana as a mental discipline and not as a religious tradition. Religious traditions are made and are broken: what is today will not remain tomorrow. Religions keep changing, they die out, they are replaced. To direct your lives towards wholeness, happiness and peace, to make your mental potential blossom, mantras have proved tremendously helpful.

What is the way to avoid sleep during mantra chanting?

When you do mantra chanting, your mind turns inwards. The externally-directed mind, going constantly hither and thither in the normal waking state, will not feel sleepy. When you close your eyes and try to make the mind one-pointed or concentrated, turning the mind inwards from being always outwardly directed, then the state of *tundra* or sleepiness comes. The state of tundra is the borderline between the waking state and the sleeping state when a person is neither asleep nor awake, but aware. If this stage comes during mantra japa it is a high state yet if you start becoming unconscious in this state, then you need a remedy.

When I was 10 or 12 years, I did anushtanas. Yet how to sit for six hours? Whenever I would sit still, I would fall asleep. So I devised a way. I tied a rope with one end to my hair and with the other end to a hook of the ceiling fan. I used to sit straight, comfortably chanting the mantra and if a short moment of sleep came, my ponytail would pull, so I used to wake up and resume my chanting. You have to find your own solutions. When you go within, the state of tundra does come up and it is a state to be desired, for meditation as well as for mental transformation.

In yoga nidra the instruction given is not to sleep. Do you keep awake? No, you don't remain awake. You are somewhere in between for there is so much relaxation in that state. If there is mental identification, there is sleep, and if there is physical identification, there is restlessness, and if you remain between these two states there is relaxation, peace, *yoga nidra*.

If during meditation this state can be arrived at, then it is smooth and even, as neither the conscious mind is active, nor the subconscious mind. Both are in a harmonious state and that is the ideal state of meditation.

When Mahatma Buddha was doing his *tapasya*, austerities, he would keep tiny slivers of hair between his two eyelids so that they would not close. That was his method, so find your own way.

It is believed that mantra should not be revealed, but it is given in written form. How do we conceal it from family members?

It is suggested that the mantra should not be revealed as it represents your innermost aspiration. If you can memorize the mantra, you can destroy the mantra booklet. If not, just roll up the booklet in a red cloth and keep it with your pooja items. There are some secret mantras which people can misuse, and there are some mantras which can never cause harm, as they do not contain that kind of energy; they contain only positive energy. The mantra you have received is filled with positive energy and your emotions should dwell in it.

If your emotions are not being consolidated in the mantra, then whether you conceal or reveal it, makes no difference, for you have not identified yourself with it. When you are practising a mantra, where is the need to tell anybody about it or your mantra sadhana. It is your secret practice. When you steal something, do you tell anybody that you are going to steal? When you do something good you want to proclaim it to the whole world. Your personal effort, your personal sadhana is personal to you, it is not a social status symbol. Do you ever tell anyone what your bank balance is? When you cannot reveal your bank balance, then why reveal your mantra to others?

Is God-realization and self-realization the same? Who is God? How do you define God? What is the difference between God and individual soul?

How can we limit to words that which cannot be spoken of, which is without end, exists since the beginningless time, and which cannot be thought of?

Realization always indicates a new understanding, a new perception. This realization happens in the course of your life. Every moment, you encounter something new, you understand something new, you discover something new in your life. You adopt something new in your life and that is known as achieving, attaining, imbibing or living.

Self with capital S represents God, and self with the little s represents the individual. The concept of God and

Self in Hindi is *Paramatma*. *Atma*, or spirit, is present in the individual and in the cosmic. The only new word that has been added is 'param'. Param defines the atma as the highest, the transcendental. There are two expressions of that spirit: the unmanifest transcendental spirit and the manifest spirit; the infinite and the finite – Paramatma and atma.

Generation, organization, destruction

God is nothing but excellence. The English word G - O - D represents the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. 'G' stands for the power of generation, the power of creation, the power of Brahma. 'O' stands for the power of organization, and for Vishnu; and 'D' stands for the power of destruction, transformation, transmutation, and Shiva or Mahesh.

If God is generation, organization and destruction, then where is this experience contained and continued? Within oneself. In Indian scriptures two aspects of God have been defined: *nirakara*, the impersonal, and *sakara*, the personal, the manifest. Nirakara or the unmanifest is uniform in all traditions: *Aum iti Brahman*. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God.

Whether in the Christian, Hindu or any other tradition, the transcendental nature responsible for the generation of the visible, manifest and the invisible, unmanifest universe, the force that is responsible for the creation, maintenance, destruction and transformation of the visible and the unmanifest world, and the law that governs creation is God. According to yoga, God is an experience of consciousness, just as peace is an experience of consciousness. From the yogic and vedantic perspective, God is consciousness defined as Sat Chit Ananda.

The nirakara God is known as Brahman. The sakara gods have been given different names: Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, Shankara and others. Nirakara is identified as *Brahman*, which means evolving and expanding consciousness. The word comes from the Sanskrit root *brin*, that which is always blossoming, always developing.

The ocean of consciousness

The discovery of consciousness is known as Self-realization. Modern psychology speaks of three dimensions of consciousness: subconscious, unconscious and conscious. Conscious is the *jagrat avastha*, subconscious, *swapna avastha* or *tandra avastha*, and unconscious, *achetanta*, absolutely devoid of any content within itself. According to yoga and the Indian tradition, there is another state of consciousness, known as *turiya avastha*, the supramental consciousness, the consciousness that exists beyond the interactive consciousness.

You can perceive this consciousness in the form of an ocean, and you are the diver. When you dive, you go deeper and deeper into the body of the ocean. On the surface, there is light. As you go deeper the light becomes less, as you go even deeper there is no light, there is absolute darkness until you come to the bottom of the ocean bed. You have to perceive consciousness like this. You are at the surface, the conscious level, where there is light. The light is filtering through the water and you can see. As you go deeper the light diminishes, it becomes darker, it is harder to see, the subconscious mind. When you still go deeper, it becomes pitch black. You do not even know where is up or down, right or left, north or south, that is total unconsciousness. When you go still deeper, and from that state of not knowing, from that pitch blackness you finally come to the bottom of the ocean, you find your stability, your *sthirtaa* there. Being on the bed of the ocean is being in the presence of God, *turiya avastha*.

Your diving from the conscious level to the subconscious, into the unconscious and to the superconscious represents the different levels of realization, awareness, and understanding of human nature and your relationship with the Divine. Self-realization is a progressive state, and the culmination happens when you realize that you are one with God, and that becomes God-realization. When you are working with your consciousness, you have to understand that you are working to experience divinity within yourself.

Jivatma

The transcendent, unmanifest consciousness is the source of creation, life, *jnana* or knowledge. That is at the higher level, yet it is the same consciousness which has come into this human body. There is a beautiful description in the *Bhagavad Gita* (15:6-7):

*Na tadbhaasayate sooryo na shashaangko na paavakah;
Yadgatvaa na nivartante taddhaama paramam mama.*

*Mamaivaamsho jeevaloke jeevabhootah sanaatanah;
Manah shashthaaneendriyaani prakritisthaani karshati.*

Neither does the sun illumine there, nor the moon, nor the fire; having gone there they return not; that is My supreme abode.

An eternal portion of Myself having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the (five) senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature.

It is the most appropriate description in relation to the subject of realization. Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, “What is your dimension? Where do you live, in your transcendental form, in your transcendental nature?” Sri Krishna replies: I live in a place where there is no luminosity of the sun, I live in a place where there is no luminosity of the moon, I live in a place where there is no movement of the wind, and I live in a place where once you go, you never return.

It is a part of me which goes to the earthly dimension, earthly realm, and when it goes there it takes along six friends. When you go on a journey do you pack your bags or not? Some preparation has to be done for a journey. In the same way, when the atma needs to descend to the earthly plane, it needs to make some preparation, it needs to pack its bags, it does not come empty-handed.

The atma comes to this place with six companions: mind and the five senses. With these companions the spirit comes into the body. The spirit does not live without these companions. If there are no senses or mind in the body, can

there be any experience for the spirit or of the spirit? The indication is, that you are an extension of that consciousness. It is known as the contained consciousness, the *jivatma*, the individual soul.

If there is an earthen pot filled with water, and you take that earthen pot to a lake and submerge it, what will happen? There is water inside the earthen pot and outside the pot, too. The walls of the earthen pot separate the water inside the pot from the water of the lake. In exactly the same way, the Supreme, which is *atma*, *shakti*, energy is contained within us and the container is made from the five senses and the mind.

The interactive consciousness is known as mind, interacting with the world of senses, objects, names and ideas. Mind is not different from consciousness. That interactive mind is this world and the passive mind is the inner nature. Yoga takes you through the experience of this passive mind, until you are able to go beyond it and come to the peaceful state of consciousness where you begin to experience the transcendental qualities.

You give a name and say Rama or Krishna is the name of God. The word 'shanti' is also a name of God. When you resolve your inner conflicts and come to peaceful states in meditation, you experience inner bliss, inner peace or *shanti*, and this 'shanti' is the name of Ishwara. At those times *shanti*, peace, and *sukha*, happiness, are also the names of Ishwara.

You eat food to satisfy your hunger, and you get satisfaction, fulfilment. In the same way, you do sadhana to remove some deficiencies from your life and you get fulfilment. The way in which you continuously undauntingly proceed, moving forward, is called *atmajnana*.

A person met me outside and said, "Swamiji, I am a jnana yogi." I asked him, "What do you do?" He replied, "Every day in the morning at breakfast I ask myself 'Who am I?'" That does that make him a jnana yogi. You have become a jnana yogi when you proceed sequentially, systematically, have achieved certain states, or see your transformation in your life and become a *sakshi*, a witness to that. When you implement the goodness that arises and reflects in your life, in that divinity you experience Ishwara.

Therefore, in life, you should not see any separation between your behaviour, temperament and Ishwara. If your conduct is good, through that you will have the realization of Ishwara. If the conduct is not good, there will be chaos, deceit and you will have darshan of Satan. You have to make an effort to direct yourself towards that goodness in every way, in your behaviour, thoughts and interactions. Then you will experience divinity and Ishwara reflected there. When you are in trouble, you remember God or guru, yet having difficulties in life is also the grace of God or guru. It is a known fact:

*Dukh mein sumiran sab kare, sukh mein kare na koe,
jo sukh mein sumiran kare, usse dukh kahe ko hoe.*

When in pain, everyone remembers God, but not when they are happy. For those who remember God even in times of happiness, what reason is there for any unhappiness.

Kunti's prayer

At the end of the Mahabharata war, Yudhishtira was installed as emperor of India and everyone went back to their kingdoms. Sri Krishna came to Kunti, his aunt, and said, "Mother, I have fulfilled my promises, I have installed your sons on the throne of Hastinapura; they have won the war. I hope you find peace now." Kunti said, "Krishna, I realize that we have won and received our kingdom, but I have a prayer, which you need to fulfil." Krishna said, "What?" She said, "Always give me suffering in life, never any pleasure." Krishna said, "What do you mean?" Kunti said, "Whenever we were suffering, you were only a thought away, whenever there was dire need in our life, you were always there, but now that you have given us the kingdom, comfort and glory, you are going away."

This is such a beautiful prayer of Kunti. In human history until date no one else but her has prayed for difficulties. Everyone prays for their own happiness, prosperity and peace, forgetting that happiness or sadness is the gift of God. How can you say that this is God's gift or that you have earned it? God will never give you what you desire, yet he will give what you need.

If the need is to remember him, he will make the provisions in your life to remember him. Suffering is a provision that he has made so that you can remember the benevolence of God. If there is no misery in the world, if there are no troubles in an organization, there will be no need of God, you will not remember him, and the mind will not go in that direction. In life consider misery and sadness as an opportunity which God provides you with to remember him, to go near him, so that by cultivating again a positive resolve and philosophy you bring laughter and joy into your life.

You become the recipient of guru's grace, when you follow the instructions of the guru. Those who keep following the guru for grace cannot be recipients of grace. When you follow the instructions and walk on the path shown to you, then surely you are a recipient of guru's grace.

In the first attempt to join the civil services I failed. I hope to achieve success and peace. Kindly bless me.

Have you read the autobiography of Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam the president of our country? Due to his deep love and affection for Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, he expressed his desire to visit Munger as the main pillar of Swami Sivananda's teaching and pay his homage toward Swami Sivananda. During his visit, he told everybody that Swami Sivananda had given him one sentence, he said, "Until today, this sentence is with me and whenever I face difficulties and tension in life, this sacred sentence comes to my aid: defeat the defeatist tendency in you." This is the message of Swami Sivananda. Do not be disheartened: by defeating and overcoming the defeatist tendency move forward.

My children have received mantra, do we tell them orally or uttering it in their ears? Can husband and wife share their mantras with each other?

Husband and wife definitely share their mantra, otherwise they will start quarrelling with each other. Or God will begin to quarrel that the husband is calling me here and the wife

is calling me there. If there is one mantra in a family, there is peace and happiness, there is no misunderstanding.

As far as children are concerned, you can record one mala japa of the mantra. If the mantra is *Om Namah Shivaya* then record it 108 times. When the child is sleeping, then play the recording. A child does not need mantra sadhana, it needs to hear the mantra. The elderly people need mantra sadhana. When children are in the state of sleep at night, their subconscious mind is receptive and sensitive. If they listen to the mantra, then it becomes their mantra sadhana. The mantra becomes a seed in the subconscious mind. Children can be given this type of mantra training.

Everybody enjoys modern facilities, including sannyasins. What is the meaning of true sannyasa?

I can only speak for the sannyasa tradition to which I belong, and I do speak on behalf of the tradition of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. I do not represent other sannyasins at present. From the experience and training that we have received from our guru Swami Satyananda and the training that he has received from his guru Swami Sivananda, we have understood sannyasa as a path of sacrifice and as dedication to a cause. The word *sannyasa* is composed of two different words, *sam* and *nyasa*, to place one's faculties and creativity in a trust to help humankind. This is the meaning of the word sannyasa today.

Swami Sivananda was the first person who made sannyasa available to society, saying that everybody had the right to experience sannyasa. So much so, that in his time many of the orthodox people called Swami Sivananda, 'Swami Propaganda', as he was open and vocal on these matters. Everybody had the right to take sannyasa, to live spirituality, yet in that sannyasa you do not have to leave society, you can live at home. Our guru Swami Satyananda started the tradition of *karma sannyasa*, where householders could live the identity of a sannyasin at home, while fulfilling their duties, commitments and responsibilities.

Poorna sannyasa is not given to everybody. In the history of our ashram, there have been only six poorna sannyasins. In the history of Swami Sivananda's ashram there has been a limited number of poorna sannyasins, people who have committed themselves to live the ideals of sannyasa, and who do not seek to adjust the ideals of sannyasa to the comfort of the modern environment. Swami Satyananda is one of them.

If you visit the ashram in Rikhia you will be witness of the basic and frugal lifestyle we live. You have looked at those who are not sannyasins, but philosophers, thinkers, householders. In our tradition, we tell people that we do not expect anything from them. We do not need a penny from you, but if we want to, then we ask for it with authority and use it for appropriate purposes. You show us an institution in our country without any infrastructure, without any work force, which takes care of fifty villages.

Sannyasins are driving tractors and ploughing fields, they make bricks and buildings for those who are without these facilities. In villages, food is not available, so sannyasins renounce their meals. If you want to see a true sannyasin, how he lives and what his ideals are, you will not find that sannyasin in Delhi, Mumbai or Kolkata. For that you will have to go to a place that is difficult to reach by train. If you have the capacity, you will see the behaviour of sannyasins.

I desire to be liberated but my past impressions keep following me.

This is like holding on to a tree and saying that the tree is not letting you go. Are your past impressions holding you or are you holding on to the impressions? Are you holding on to desires or are desires holding you?

Culture or *samyak* is the expression of life in totality. The wholistic expression of life is seen as samskara, and this culture or samskara is always refined. Culture is always good and never bad. In totality there is no negativity. One who is total cannot be impure. So it is always refined, pure, and there cannot be bad impressions.

Impressions are always good. If you see somebody misbehave, you say the impressions are bad. This is incorrect usage of the word. The person's performance is bad, but the impressions or samskaras are not bad. There can be bad thought, bad concepts, selfish thinking, and one can act and behave according to them, yet that is not due to bad samskara. Samskaras represent the positive traits and trends of a personality and to imbibe good samskaras should be one of your purposes in life. You should attempt to imbibe appropriate samskaras and to be rid of improper actions. To fulfil this, there is no need to sacrifice anybody and neither to free anybody.

How can I give up anger?

In stress situations, the secretion of adrenaline becomes responsible for the fight or flight mechanism, which enables you to either confront a situation or run away from it. It is a chemical process that allow the body to perform or behave in a certain manner. In anger there is also a change in the chemical composition of the body and brain.

If you can, through the practice of asanas, regulate the hormonal change of your body, then you can overcome aggression. According to yoga there is one particular asana, *shashankasana*, the hare pose. It has been found that the posture of shashankasana, influences the endocrine system and rectifies the imbalances of the endocrine gland system. The secretions and output of hormones is more balanced and regulated, and therefore it becomes easier to manage the expressions of anger.

Giving up anger is not possible, as anger is a natural, inherent expression of the human personality. In our body there are three smugglers: greed, anger and passion. What do they smuggle? They smuggle wisdom from your life. For the purpose of stealing the gems of wisdom, passion, anger and greed are the three inherent characteristics. You cannot get rid of them, for the moment you get rid of them, you have to get rid of yourself. You have to kill this little 'I' too which is not easy.

Instead of killing, mature, become a better and more positive person. The management of these conditions from the physical level is attainable through the practice of asana. Any mental state creates a corresponding chemical change in the body and therefore with the practice of asana it is possible to manage different mental states, which even meditation is not able to manage. In meditation you manage anger only by being a witness. In shashankasana you are bringing about a balance in the chemical secretions.

How can we implement practices to overcome 'ego' in our lives?

Become simple and natural. The best way to manage the ego is to become simple and natural. Where there is rigidity, the ego will become stronger. The example is of a tree which stands rigid in a hurricane, it gets uprooted. The tree which bends in the hurricane, stands straight again after the hurricane. Ego represents that stiff character of personality which does not know how to bend. The stiff character of personality is known as arrogance, as ego, ambition, the ambitious drive. It can be managed in meditation by learning how to connect with the purity, simplicity and innocence of the heart.

How can we assess our spiritual progress in life?

There are different parameters. Paramahamsaji, our Guru, says that the growth of spiritual life is indicated by the development of seeing oneself in others. The development of spiritual life is seen in the growth of *atmabhava*. It is not compassion or empathy, it is oneness. The mother sees herself in the child; there is identification and the feeling of oneness.

If the feeling of oneness is not developed, there cannot be spiritual progress. Only when you have this feeling of oneness for others, can spiritual consciousness begin to awaken. Prior to that you are working to develop your mind, to come to the point where you can experience that oneness known as *atmabhava*. This is the teaching of Paramahamsaji which is so relevant today.

Lord Buddha gave a different indication, saying that the growth in spiritual life can be observed with the lessening of human desire. The less desire you have, the more advanced you are in spiritual life. This was the concept of Buddha, for his aspiration was to have a mind free from desires and expectations. This was relevant for the time when Buddha lived, as that was the social mentality of that time: the need to reduce desires. Today, you use desire as a motivating force to achieve your aspirations and goals in life. You have the ability to direct your desires, motivations and expectations and analyze them. Lessening desires is not the criteria today. The criteria has changed.

Today you have become isolated from each other and as you move towards the modern trends of the civilization, you become even more isolated from each other. First there was an extended family which became a nuclear family. In the nuclear family there were too few family members. In the future you will become even more isolated from each other, from connections, friends, support and securities, unless you practise atmabhava and feel oneness with family members, friends, all your connections, and offer support and security even to people you do not know.

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Mumbai

Nasik



Yoga and Viyoga

2 March 2006, Shahji Raje Bhosle Stadium, Andheri

Life is nothing but a momentary experience of awareness in the span and timelessness of infinity. Life is only an experience when you become aware of yourself and the interaction of the senses with the world of objects. The journey from birth to death is life, which is only a momentary experience in the form of infinity. What is the existence of 60 years, 70 years, 80 years that we live on this planet, or maybe 100? Do those 100 years have any relevance in infinity? It is the blink of an eyelid, that is all.

That blink, that momentary awareness when you realize that you are born – you exist, you live – that activity of consciousness is known as the experience of life. That momentary awakening of consciousness, and realization of it as existence, is known as life.

Bhoga and yoga

In this life, the interactions with yourself, your family members, your near or dear ones, the excellence that you acquire and your skills are nothing but an interaction of your senses and mind with the world of objects. And when the senses and mind associate in the world of objects, the result is attachment. The outcome of that attachment is the experience of pleasure and pain. That is all and that is life.

Your ideas, perceptions relationships, confusions are individual, they happen naturally. Your recognition of people as strangers, family members, wife, husband, children and

relatives is incidental. The mind and senses are associating with the world of objects, with name, with form and ideas. This association gives birth to the experience of bliss and pain. The effort of every individual in life is to experience more happiness, contentment and fulfilment, and to lessen the intensity of separation, pain and suffering.

If you analyze life in a different light, you will understand that every individual is treading the middle path – there is no one who is free from it or who can change that direction. *Bhoga* means the association and enjoyment of the senses and mind with the external, created, manifest and natural world. The outcome from that association is giving you the experience of happiness and discontent. This *bhoga* in the life of an individual has to be fifty percent happiness and fifty percent unhappiness.

When the percentage of unhappiness increases in life and dissatisfaction increases from 50 to 60, to 70, to 80 percent, there is reduction of contentment, fulfilment and joy. Then suffering leads to illness and disease by disturbing the natural balance of body and mind. Illnesses are experienced in the body; imbalances are experienced in the mind. If you go to one extreme instead of walking the middle path, then *roga*, imbalances, are experienced. As you increase the percentage of happiness and joy in life and reduce unhappiness and suffering in mind, you begin to experience *yoga* – you feel the unity of your nature with the cosmic, creative and unmanifest nature. You always remain on top of the world, above the influences of the mind and senses.

When you suffer, you are under the influence of the mind and senses. Your effort has to be to increase the percentage of fulfilment, contentment and happiness by reducing unhappiness. Realizing and knowing the difference, and having the ability to merge the movement from one extreme to the other has been defined in the Indian and yogic traditions as the *pravritti* path and the *nivritti* path. *Pravritti* means one who is identifying with the world and the senses. *Nivritti* means one who becomes free from the negative identification of the senses.

Spiritual awareness

Recognize and yet remain free from the influences of the sensorial, sensual, mental associations – that is the idea of spiritual life. That idea has to be cultivated with the practices of yoga. Your journey in life begins in the direction of the world of senses and sense objects, seeking fulfilment, sensual and sensorial satisfaction, emotional and intellectual satisfaction, social fulfilment, prosperity, name and fame. This association integrates you more and more with the experiences that you are having. Imbalances in these experiences leads to disease, illness, disturbances at physical, mental and emotional levels, and eventually to restricting and closing down faculties of consciousness.

The destiny of the man in the course of evolution is to attain spiritual awareness. This is not spiritual enlightenment – that is too far away. Spiritual awareness is something you can attain right now, through persistent effort, sadhana, and determination. By cultivating a spiritual awareness, maybe one day you may transcend the limitations of your personality and nature and experience the vastness of your mind, energy and consciousness.

Spiritual awareness is opposite to the sensorial, sensual and material awareness. Imagine a road running from east to west; when you start walking and the sun is shining on your back and you are facing west on the road, the shadow of your body goes first. When you turn around and you face the sun and begin your journey to the east, the body goes first and the shadow follows. This is an example of how world and spirituality are related.

You are at a point on the road: to one side is the material world in which you follow your shadow, and on the other side is the spiritual world in which the shadow follows you. You are all making the journey towards material fulfilment, and there is nothing wrong with it, yet at the same time, there has to be the awareness that you can journey back to the source, to your roots. That awareness becomes the spiritual awareness.

Yoga becomes the way to awaken spiritual awareness and the dormant faculties of life by changing your direction. Now

you are filled with selfishness, passions, desires, expectations, and the association of your senses with people and objects that you feel will give you happiness and joy. When you turn your head from that direction, you are not negating it. The only difference is that in the initial stage you were craving for it, now you are not. If it is there, it is there, if it is not there, it is simply not there. This disassociation of the mind and senses from the expectations that you create in life is the beginning of the spiritual journey of every person. It is not renunciation or rejection, it is knowing the right from the wrong and acting appropriately.

When you make an attempt to live yoga and practise yoga, this balance comes between the material aspirations and the personal, inner aspirations, which brings an intense identification with wisdom and not with selfish passions. That wisdom becomes passionate too, and develops a lot of strength, energy and willpower, which allows you to grow and cultivate the positive in you by overcoming the detrimental and negative.

Sadhana

Learning to disassociate from the influences and outcomes of actions, thoughts, expectations and ambitions is spirituality. The process that tells you how to do it is yoga. To live yoga, you have to disconnect from the *pravritti*, the worldly, material identification where you forget yourself, and connect with the *nivritti*, with your natural wisdom and strength. In yoga disconnection takes place first, and connection takes place second. Therefore, the definition of yoga is first *viyoga*, separation, disconnection, and then *yoga*, connection, union.

Imagine there are two sockets. One plug which is you is in one socket, and that socket is the world. The three holes in the socket represent the positive, negative and neutral; they represent the *trigunas* – *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. While you are connected to the socket which represents the world, you are illumined in the world, you are connected to the world. The other socket represents spirituality. When you connect yourself with spiritual life, you are illumined on the spiritual

path. However, to be illumined on the spiritual path, you have to disconnect your plug from the material socket and put it in the spiritual socket. The pulling of the plug from the material socket is known as the yoga of disassociation, viyoga. When you put the plug in the socket of spirituality it becomes yoga. Viyoga and yoga are complementary forms of sadhana for an individual. It is the effort you make to transcend the limitations imposed by the senses, the body, mind and emotions.

This yogic sadhana is a multidimensional sadhana. It revives the potentials of the body and the physiological systems through the practices of hatha yoga and asanas. This process makes the attempt to increase the vitality of the body-mind unit through the practices and techniques that increase vitality and prana. It then leads to the disconnection from the negative associations in the world of senses and objects through the practices of pratyahara, concentration and meditation. Then yogic sadhana tries to revive the inherent creative nature of an individual by awakening the latent and dormant potentials of life, by working with chakras and energies in the system of kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. You are working at the physical, pranic, mental and psychic levels. These four levels are tackled together, for unless you tackle them simultaneously, growth will always be lopsided.

Imagine the four tyres of the car – one physical, one pranic, one mental and one psychic. On these four tyres you drive the car of your life. If you focus only on the body; it is like putting air in one tyre only. If you are increasing the pressure in one tyre, and not the other three, how can the car move forward with ease? Some people practise meditation as well, yet ignore the remaining two, so there is always imbalance in your practice; never do the four tyres have the same pressure in your life. Therefore, ensure that the physical, pranic, mental and psychic tyres have the same pressure. When all the four tyres are equally pressurized, there is no danger, and you can drive on a super-smooth highway or on a potholed road with ease and comfort.

Do not attempt to journey in life with one or two over-inflated tyres and two or three deflated. Most definitely

do not make the journey with all four tyres deflated. Yoga sadhana begins with the physical body, stimulates and awakens the pranic body, harmonizes the mental body and awakens the psychic body. The relevance of yoga in your life is to improve the quality, creativity and to cultivate the positive nature in your life – to become a complete human being. In this completeness and wholeness the mind becomes transcendental, and when the mind becomes transcendental, you experience the fullness which is the experience of you – the real self.

Your Yoga Practice

2 March 2006, Shahji Raje Bhosle Stadium, Andheri

According to the tradition of yoga, a yoga class must comprise of different practices and not only one. The class of yoga should always contain the component of body, prana, mental relaxation and mental contemplation. Therefore, the Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga tradition does not teach a class of hatha yoga where postures are taught for one hour. Rather the ratio is 20 minutes of asana, 10 minutes of pranayama, 15 minutes of relaxation, and 15 minutes of meditation.

Koshas – five levels of existence

The Bihar Yoga system emphasizes the use of more techniques in a class because your body is not just the physical body. Different experiences are contained in the body which in the yogic terminology are defined as koshas. *Kosha* means sheath, where you place your sword or dagger, or it means a covering.

According to yogic principles, there are five different koshas in this physical body. The first kosha is the covering of matter, the material body, or *annamaya kosha*, which derives its nourishment, strength, nutrients from the food or *anna* that you consume. The second sheath is *pranamaya kosha*, the pranic body, more subtle than annamaya. Contained in the muscles of the body is strength which is utilized whenever there is a need. Otherwise it is an integrated, inherent part of the muscular system. In the same manner, prana is contained in the body and as an integral part of the physical system, yet it is subtler than the gross body. Beyond the pranamaya

kosha, is manomaya kosha, the experience of the mind. The fourth sheath is *vijnanamaya kosha*, the psychic body, and the fifth is *anandamaya kosha*, the spiritual body.

For the integrated, homogenous and balanced development of the human nature and personality, for health and wellbeing, and to meet the needs of the body, you have different practices of asana. To meet the demands of the pranic body and to increase the vitality, stamina and the level of pranic, electromagnetic energy, there is the practice of pranayama. Then to relax the mental body, the stresses and tensions accumulated during your interactions with the world, there is the practice of relaxation. Finally, to access the psychic nature of your personality you practise meditation.

When the physical, pranic, mental and psychic bodies become activated and are in tune with each other, the spiritual body becomes awake, and spiritual awareness dawns. This is the principle that yoga has been following. This is how yoga sees a person, not just through the eyes of the senses; the deeper characteristics of the personality are defined in yoga through koshas.

Therefore, the practice of yoga must cater to each level of your existence. If you practise one hour of asana and ignore pranayama, relaxation and meditation, your yoga will not give you the desired and appropriate results which help in the transformation of attitudes, mentality, conditioning and samskaras.

Your total wellbeing is the result of a balanced, disciplined personality, regulated behaviour, performance and wellbeing. Health and peace are the symptoms of a balanced human nature, which is not distracted and dissipated. Therefore, the four components of yoga: asana, pranayama, relaxation and preparation for meditation, should be and must be practised in a class environment; not just one component of yoga.

Another important aspect is that awareness and breath have to join the movement of the body when you practise the postures. No movement should be an unconscious movement, rather every act is a conscious act. Only in that manner will you be able to develop the ability of the mind to recognize its own natural condition.

When you practise asanas, ensure that you are following the principles of *sthirata* and *sukha*, stability or firmness, and comfort. That is how Maharishi Patanjali defined the asana: *sthirasukham asanam*. If the asana deviates from this concept of stability and comfort it becomes gymnastics and is not an asana anymore. Therefore, the speed of each asana has to be regulated to provide all round benefits.

Then you practise pranayama and relaxation, or the practice of yoga nidra. Yoga nidra was discovered by our guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, when he was living with his guru in Rishikesh at Sivananda ashram. It is his creation and the trademark of the Bihar School of Yoga teachings. After the completion of yoga nidra, you practise concentration. Meditation is not a practice; it is a state of being. This is the progression defined in the yogic tradition. In ashtanga yoga, after yama, niyama and asana, come pranayama, pratyahara and dharana. The seventh stage is meditation, which is never performed consciously or wilfully. Meditation is a spontaneous state of experience of existence.

Pratyahara

The meditative awareness is the outcome of your having perfected *pratyahara*, sensory withdrawal from the world of objects, otherwise meditation can never take place. This is confirmed by the experience of those who renounce the world and go to the Himalayas in search of quietness and peace to do their sadhana, yet their mind is so disturbed and dissipated that even in the Himalayas they are not at peace with themselves. When the mind is handled and guided in the proper manner, then even in the middle of the market, you will not be disturbed by the noise but you will experience peace. Our guru Swami Satyananda has said clearly that 'there is no noise in the world and there is no peace in the Himalayas'. What you experience is the expression of the dissipated nature of your own mind. This nature of mind has to be confronted with the practice of pratyahara to access the manomaya dimension of your existence.

Concentration is a vast practice, which begins with awareness of the body, *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of the body,

and develops the breath, mantra and symbol awareness. Many Upanishads describe the process of ajapa japa and its benefits. It is the most known technique of achieving concentration, yet first you must perfect the technique of pratyahara, without which you cannot progress in spiritual life.

Kabirdas, the great poet saint of India, has described the state of ajapa japa in one of his poems:

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai,
Soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahase ikkisau jaap,
Anahada upaje apai aapa.*

Kabirdas describes the process of ajapa japa, focusing of the mind on the breath, the image and the sound of the mantra. This merger ideally continues for 21,600 breaths, which is the number of breaths you breathe in 24 hours at an average of 13 to 15 breaths per minute. If the mind, mantra and breath can remain merged with each other for 24 hours without any dissipation or distraction, then you will know that you have perfected pratyahara, and you move to the state of dharana.

This is an indication of how difficult it is to achieve the state of pratyahara, which is the first requirement for advancing in the meditative aspect of sadhana. Therefore, this practice should be performed by every individual regardless of belief, culture, tradition, religion or sect, as it helps to improve the quality and nature of mind. In this manner, your yoga practice has to be combined with body awareness, with mind awareness, with breath awareness, with pranic awareness.

Daily routine

For a healthy person only five asana practices need to be done. Otherwise, if you look at the vast number of yogic practices it is impossible to decide which one you should or should not do. Five practices for a healthy person are important: *tadasana*, palm tree pose, *tiryak tadasana*, swaying palm tree pose, *kati chakrasana*, waist rotating pose, *surya namaskara*, the sun salutation, and one posture of inversion in which you reverse the gravitational pull by adopting a posture of

either *sarvangasana*, shoulder stand, *vipareeta karani asana*, inverted pose, or *sirshasana*, the head stand. These five asanas must constitute the normal and daily yoga routine of a healthy person seeking vitality, dynamism, relaxation and concentration – physical and mental wellbeing.

There are few point about diet. Our stomach is sensitive to what we eat, and it conditions itself to digest what is our normal and natural food. As a discipline, a person who is involved in *bhoga*, pleasure, enjoyment, society and the materialistic world, should have three meals only: breakfast, lunch and dinner, and nothing in between. Your habits are different, every time you feel like it you put something in your mouth, either a snack, a biscuit, a cup of tea, something is always going in to your stomach. Each time something goes into your stomach, the digestive fluids come to digest what you have consumed. Whether you eat one peanut or a full plate of peanuts, the same amount of digestive juices is secreted. Therefore, if you eat three times a day, digestion will happen three times a day.

Once a person said to me, “Swamiji, I need some help. My stomach is upset all the time, but I hardly eat anything.” I said, “Please describe your food habits.” “In the morning I wake up and have tea and nothing after that. Then after one hour, when I have freshened up, I have nuts and kishmish, and nothing more after that. After one hour, I have my breakfast, which is pancakes, cornflakes, poha, dosa and samosa and nothing more after that. After one hour I take a glass of juice and nothing more. After one hour I take my cup of tea with a few biscuits and nothing more.”

He continued on and on, and I discovered that he would eat at least sixteen times a day, every hour on the hour, either a cup of tea, a biscuit, something. I said, “No wonder your stomach is upset; you are leaving a gap of one hour between each thing that you put in your mouth. Sixteen times the stomach is flushing with the digestive juices produced to digest what you have consumed, so there is hyperacidity, bile and burning sensations in the chest and stomach. There is gas and constipation.”

The logic is simple. In a toilet you have the flush. If you keep on flushing it every hour on the hour, how long will that flush serve you? Chances of a breakdown are much more than with a regulated use of the flush three times a day. Diet is a bad habit in your life, for you don't eat to live, you live to eat. Your attitude has to change, you should eat to live and not eat beyond your requirements.

You can follow the ayurvedic theory. You should eat fifty percent solid, then twenty-five percent should be liquid in the stomach, and twenty-five empty. That is the principle of ayurveda, to be able to derive the nutrients from your meal and to infuse your body with strength, energy and stamina. If you eat more than what is required, the body and the energies of the body will become dull and the activity of the senses will be sluggish. You will experience lethargy and sleepiness, and mental alertness will diminish. Therefore, try to regulate your eating patterns to three meals a day – you can even come down to two meals a day. People have died due to overeating, for it strains the system; balanced eating energizes the system.

Three disciplines

There is one more point regarding your yoga class. Sage Patanjali mentioned three disciplines to be followed in your yoga practice (1:14):

Sa tu deerghakaala nairantayasatkaaraasevito dridhabhoomih.

By being continued for a long time without interruption with reverence it becomes firmly grounded.

The three disciplines or attitudes that you need to have during the practice of yoga to derive the maximum benefit from it are: practise for a long time, *deerghakaala*. A long-time does not mean hours, like one, two or five hours. It means over a long period of time, not one week you practise and one week you do not practise, three days yes, four days no. It means keep going steadily over a long period of time.

Nairantarya is the second discipline, continuously without interruption. There has to be no break. With your yoga practice, you are trying to change the conditioning and the behaviour patterns of the internal organs of the physical body and your mental behaviour, and its expressions. To change the habits of the body and mind is difficult. You may not change the habit, yet you can work on effective conditioning of the body and mind to respond to certain situations in a more efficient and effective manner. The third attitude to have is faith and conviction, *satkaara*.

These are the prime requirements and disciplines for the perfection of yoga in life. You have to believe in what you are doing, you have to have faith that your practice will help you and bring improvement. Therefore, practise for a long time, regularly without interruption and breaks, and have the conviction that your practice will bear fruit. If you practise yoga keeping these three disciplines in mind, you will definitely be an achiever; not a loser but a winner.

Question and Answer

2 March 2006

What is hatha yoga, and more specifically, the six practices of cleansing?

The yogic tradition and the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali say that before the commencement of raja yoga or ashtanga yoga practices, everyone must perfect themselves in the practices of hatha yoga. According to yogic tradition and scriptures, without perfection in hatha yoga, one cannot enter raja yoga.

Why do you come to yoga? If you come to yoga for temporary gain, like eradication of a problem, illness, disease, stress, tension – and you use yoga as an alternative method of healing, then it makes no difference what type of yoga you practise. You can practise anything, you can improve the quality of your health, life, body and mind, and after achieving your aspirations, you can forget about the practice of yoga completely. That is one way of looking at yoga which most people follow.

The other method is to decide whether yoga is going to become your discipline in life or not. Then it is a way of transcending the limitations of your senses, mind and personality. If you are aiming for a qualitative transformation of your life to enhance the process of evolution, and for a different type of inner awakening, which brings you closer to the world in which you live with other people, then yoga has to be practised with a different sankalpa. A proper application of yoga must be there in your life – not taking one grain here and one grain there.

In the proper application of yoga, every one, without any doubt, must go through the practices of hatha yoga, the cleansing techniques, to rid the body of the toxicity accumulated within the different systems in the gross and subtle manner. The state of physical purity, the state of detoxification, will lead to a balance between the physical and mental energies. This is the purpose of hatha yoga.

The word 'ha-tha' contains two bija mantras of ajna chakra, which is also the logo of Bihar School of Yoga. On one petal is written *Ham* and on the other petal is written *Ksham*, which in Sanskrit is also spoken as *Tham*. The two petals of ajna chakra represent the coming together of ida and pingala, the solar and the lunar forces. *Ham* is the mantra of the solar energy, prana shakti, the vital force. *Tham* is the bija mantra of the lunar force, ida nadi, the power of mind. Prana shakti and chitta shakti, the vital force and mental force, solar force and lunar force, yang and yin, merge in ajna chakra.

The purpose of hatha yoga is to awaken the solar and lunar forces within and bring about a balance in the functions of the physical prana shakti and the mental chitta shakti. Hatha yoga is a specific yoga; its purpose is to cleanse the pathways of prana shakti. The cleaning of the pathways of prana shakti is known as *nadi shuddhi*. The six cleansing techniques of hatha yoga clean the entire system from the head down to the perineum, including the oesophagus, stomach, small intestines and large intestine. It is a complete cleansing technique for the body.

After the body has been cleansed with the practice of neti, dhauti and basti, then pranayama is taught, to ensure that the prana shakti goes through the *nadis*, the channels, that have been purified. The beginning of concentration and activation of the chakras is taught through specific kriyas. Kapalabhati is not just one practice of pranayama, it is a series of methods to control the movement of prana in your body. Trataka is the simplest way to focus the mind, without having to fight and struggle with yourself. Nauli is the specific kriya to activate a particular psychic centre in the space of manipura chakra, the generating station of prana shakti.

Along with these cleansing techniques and specific kriyas, the different energy locks and techniques to divert the flow of energy in your body in the form of mudras and bandhas have to be learnt. Only then can you derive the appropriate benefits from the practices of raja yoga afterwards. According to the yogic tradition, you have to perfect hatha yoga before coming to raja yoga. Before attempting to practise higher yogas, you must have perfected raja yoga. There is a sequence, a process. If you are willing to make yoga into a discipline of life, you have to follow the system, and if you follow the system, your attainments and achievements in life will definitely be positive.

How should we practise pranayama?

Only if you understand the human physiology and anatomy, will you gain that basic understanding of how pranayama works in your system. Patanjali says that pranayama is inhalation, exhalation and breath retention. He does not tell you how to breathe, where to breathe, how long to breathe, what types of pranayamas exist. He has spoken specifically on the general idea and given one specific pranayama in the *Yoga Sutras*. He has not covered the subject of pranayama, which you find in more detail in hatha yoga, where the different practices of pranayama are described, like nadi shodhana, ujjayi, bhramari, kapalbhata, plavini, bhastrika, sheetali, sheetkari. There are a large number of practices of pranayama.

Each practice of pranayama fulfils a specific purpose for the development and awakening of the energy centres in the body, and each pranayama, in the beginning, is associated with breath. Through the regulation of breath control, you are asked to experience the activity of pranayama, increasing the dimension of prana shakti. *Prana* means vital energy and *ayama* means to expand, to increase the dimension. The literal meaning of the word *pranayama* is to increase the dimension, the area of vital energy.

Respiration is a method by which you can begin to experience prana shakti. Prana is in everything, and

in relation to everything, it has a different name. The various manifestations of prana shakti are identified as electromagnetic waves that travel in your body. They are identified as bioplasmic waves, experienced as an electrical current in the body. There are different names for prana shakti according to their different manifestations in the environment, within the body and chakras. 'Prana' is both the name of the energy in the universe and the energy within you. When you begin to work with specific areas of respiration to induce a certain change in the activity of prana shakti, different flows of prana are experienced.

When you use the breath, you have to understand the anatomy and physiology of the lungs. The lungs are divided in three parts: the upper lobe, the middle lobe, and the lower lobe. In the middle and lower lobes, there are alveoli or air bags throughout the lungs. The maximum number is in the middle lobe. In the lower lobes, the different gases are separated from the air. Oxygen is separated and mixes with the blood more freely and easily in the lower region of the lungs. The CO₂ is expelled. Good circulation relaxes the heart.

The lungs are separated from the digestive region by the diaphragm, which is in an arched posture most of the time. When you breathe deeply into the lower part of the lungs, allowing the breath to flow to the lower lobes, the diaphragm is pressed downwards and the digestive system is stimulated by that internal pressure. In pranayama, with the movement of breath in different regions of the body, you create positive and negative pressures to activate a particular organ or to slow down a particular function.

Breathing has been defined as thoracic breathing, or deep abdominal breathing, which indicates the process where the breath moves in a particular pattern. In yogic breathing, the emphasis is on inhaling the air to the lower lobes of the lungs. If you are practising pranayama to increase the vitality of the body, you have to allow the oxygenation to happen in a much simpler, smoother and easier way. In the practice of pranayama, it is emphasized that the breath has to be

absolutely regulated – equal inhalation and equal exhalation. The normal ratio, the difference between inhalation and exhalation is 1:2. If you inhale for one second, you exhale for two seconds.

When you begin to control the breath, it is the regulated breath which gives you the experience of prana shakti. Along with the positive and negative pressures created internally, you are also asked to experience the nerve plexus in the body, which releases the dormant or the held back energy from within them. There is a new burst of energy which you feel.

There are many scriptures on pranayama, swara yoga and prana vidya, which describe in detail the science of pranayama and prana.

This is a subject of in-depth study which you should understand in relation to human anatomy and physiology. After all, the body and self is a microcosmic experience. If the universe is macrocosmic, the body is a microcosmic universe. In this microcosmic universe, there are centres of energy, which correspond to *prithvi tattwa* and *jala tattwa*, the earth and water elements. One element is represented in each chakra, and each chakra is responsible for a specific manifestation of prana shakti. Each manifestation of prana shakti has a different colour, and stimulates different modes of perception. Therefore, this is not a subject that should be taken lightly.

What can I to improve the vibrations in my house?

This is a good question. You have to understand that the environment which you create is influenced by the vibrations that you emit through your thoughts, feelings, emotions, and your responses to different situations. According to yoga, all forms of life are forms of energy. What you perceive as solid matter, is composed of compressed atoms. Each atom has energy at the centre. Deep down inside the structure, there is no solidity, there is only energy, light and heat. That is your body, although you are not aware of it; you only feel your body to be made up of bones, muscles, tissue, blood and so many other components.

The projections of this form, this body, are also in the form of energy. Emotions, feelings, speech, thoughts are energy. This energy vibrates at certain frequencies all the time. Speech is coming out with a specific frequency and vibration. Ideas, thoughts have a special frequency and vibration. These are being emitted. You are living transmitters of energy, like radio stations, transmitting waves and waves of energy, in the form of thoughts, feelings, emotions, strong associations and responses to situations and circumstances.

That energy can be picked up by other people. Just as the invisible and unseen radio waves can be picked up by the radio, in the same way the mental wave patterns can also be captured with sensitive equipment. The biggest piece of sensitive equipment in your life is your own mind. These vibrations which you are emitting all the time can be made positive with the right *sankalpas*, affirmations, aspirations.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda has said, that no matter what you do in life, whether you are a social person or a recluse, a person who is climbing the social ladder or a person who is living a simple life, whether affluent or poor, your sect, religion, culture and society make no difference, everyone must practise three mantras every day. You can in your own house enact that. All family members from son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister and servants who stay in the house should participate in improving the quality of the environment by chanting Mahamrityunjaya mantra 11 times every day.

In the morning when you wake up, freshen up, stand upright and straight facing north or east so that your energies are aligned with the electromagnetic fields of the earth, and with the palms together, chant 11 times the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, in three minutes you can do 11 mantras easily.

Om tryambakamyajaamahesugandhimpushtivardhanam.

Urvaarukamivabandhanaatmrityormuksheeyamaamritaat.

After the completion of Mahamrityunjaya mantra which is the mantra of healing, repeat the mantra of creativity, the Gayatri mantra. Grown-ups need to practise the Gayatri mantra more than children, for children are maturing, evolving, developing

and their doors of learning and perception are open. In the life of grown-ups, the doors of knowing and perception have closed a long time ago, Therefore, don't force your children to do the Gayatri mantra, you yourself should do the Gayatri mantra and that will open the doors of wisdom. If your doors of wisdom are open, you will make less blunders in life and will be more satisfied. So repeat the Gayatri mantra 11 times.

Om bhoorbhuvahsvahtatsaviturvarenyam.

Bhargodevasyaadheemahidhiyoyo nahprachodayaat.

Then the 32 names of Durga are to be chanted three times to remove agony and suffering from life, and to smooth our growth in the journey of life.

Om durgaadurgaartishamaneedurgaapadviniivaarinee.

Durgamachchhedineedurgasaadhineedurganaashinee.

Durgatoddhaarineedurganihantreedurgamaapahaa.

Durgamajnaanaadaadurgadaityalokadavaanala.

Durgamaadurgamaalokaadurgamaatmasvaroopinee.

Durgamaargapradaadurgamaavidyaadurgamaashritaa.

Durgamajnaanasamsthaanaadurgamadhyaanabhaasinee.

Durgamohaadurgamagaadurgamaarthasvaroopinee.

Durgamaasurasamhantreedurgamaayudhadhaarinee.

Durgamaangeedurgamataadurgamyaadurgameshvaree.

Durgabheemaadurgabhaamaadurgabhaadurgadaarinee.

This is the entire process. Repeating these mantras takes 15 minutes, which is the most valuable time that you can ever spend in your life. Improve the vibrations and frequencies in which you pulsate during the course of the day. You will be able to transmit better a sense of positivity, wellbeing and optimism, and you will begin to laugh, love and live life. In that way, an overall improvement in the environment of the house can take place. Whoever enters your house will find solace, peace and contentment.

Make this a discipline of your life. Before you begin any activity of the day, before your asana practice, your pooja, and meditation, before you involve yourself in the activities of the world, do the three mantras, and may the grace of God illumine your path

Developing Positive Samskaras

4 March 2006, Andheri Sports Complex, Mumbai

Samskaras are impressions in the field of consciousness. These impressions decide our destiny, the direction of our life, the character that we develop and the mentality that we are endowed with. This happens at a subtle level, at the level of the unconscious.

The field of samskaras

The faculty of consciousness has three dimensions: conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The conscious dimension is responsible for logical, linear analysis. The subconscious dimension is responsible for the creation of desires, associations and attachments, identities that we recognize as good and bad, right and wrong, positive and negative. The unconscious dimension represents the field where the seeds of impressions are latent.

The latency of impressions in the unconscious must be understood properly. Imagine that you are holding a seed in the palm of your hand. You can break open the seed, layer by layer, but you will not find a tree in it. However, in each seed lies the absolute possibility of manifestation: of becoming a tree. The seed becomes a tree, although you cannot see the tree, roots, leaves or fruits in it. Similarly, the unknown dimension of the consciousness has been defined as the unconscious by psychologists. Why 'unconscious', why not 'unknown'? The reason is simple: consciousness reflects the level of awareness that one has at a certain stage in life.

You may know that there is noise outside the room you are in; you cannot hear the noise, but you know and realize that it exists – that is the unconscious. It is not unknown; you know that the sounds are there, but your awareness is not expansive enough to hear the sounds. Therefore, to define the unknown area of the consciousness, the word ‘unconscious’ has been used. It denotes absence of awareness from that dimension. It is in this dimension that impressions or samskaras are created, nurtured, and mature.

Sometimes, samskaras manifest in the form of fear or insecurity. Samskaras manifest in the form of strength or a positive quality. They can manifest as an aggressive nature and a peaceful nature. The important point is that human beings can manage these samskaras and create a new set of them. If they could not do so, it would be a great problem for there would be no scope for transformation.

Impressions in the womb

We receive the initial set of impressions from our mother in the deep unconscious in the womb. We are born with them. Therefore, it is possible to learn the skills of life, to acquire wisdom, while we are in the womb, provided the mother is disciplined, conscious and spiritually awakened. It is only a spiritually-awakened mother who is capable of imparting the right samskaras. With proper application of yogic practices, the child can be imbued with positive attitudes, samskaras and qualities in the womb itself through the mother. She can become a conduit for the purity of the consciousness of the child.

Second level of samskaras

The second level of samskaras is attained after the child is born, from the day of birth until the age of about three or four years, before the intellect starts to function, before the parents begin to develop the child’s brain power by teaching him, “A for apple, B for boy.” The moment they start saying this, the psychic nature of the child shuts down and the intellectual nature begins to develop and mature.

The psychic nature, the intuitive and receptive nature of the spirit shuts down at the age of three, or whenever one starts the intellectual education of the child. There are people who start its intellectual education before the child is even born; they register the child for school when it is in the womb! Therefore, the growth of the child is lopsided, it is intellectual and without sensitivity. There is no sensitivity towards understanding human character, or reaching out to those in need. There is absolute selfishness in life.

In the second set of samskaras, the child receives cultural education and impressions: what to say and what not to say, to abide by truth or falsity; to develop a positive and dynamic personality or a pessimistic and negative attitude; to be reactive as the family members are reactive, or to live a life in which peace becomes the hallmark and creativity the ultimate expression. This set of samskaras is received through the environment at home.

Whatever appears in front of a new-born makes a difference in the perception and the quality of the child. You may think that the child is only a dumb one-month-old baby who cannot hear or understand a word, yet you are wrong. A word is energy, sounds are expressions of different vibrations and frequencies, and one can alter these frequencies wilfully. This frequency is *shakti*, power.

The word has the power to uplift as well as destroy. However, you fail to see the energy contained in words. Thoughts are energy, too; your attitude is energy which is being transmitted. Your entire life is an expression of consciousness and energy, nothing else. Therefore, it is possible for yoga to create a balanced state of samskaras through the application of different techniques and systems.

Working on the second level

The second level of samskaras that a child receives can be made positive if the environment at home is improved. This is imperative if you want a better future generation. What can you do to achieve this? Practise mantras. No matter which sect, religion or tradition you belong to, practise the mantras

appropriate to that tradition for the wellbeing, creative development and upliftment of all who live in the house. The vibrations of mantras affect and influence the subconscious behaviour in a subtle way.

Mantras are not related to personages, but to inherent faculties. It has been the principle and philosophy of yoga that each mantra, sound, vibration and frequency, known or unknown, audible and inaudible, is contained and inherent in the different energy centres. These pulsate at a certain speed and rhythm, thus affecting the object in which they exist, the body. Yoga mantras are not religious mantras, they are spiritual mantras. They are vibrations by which you can free your mind from the bondage of the senses and karmas, attain freedom from the gross nature and establish yourself in an awakened and balanced nature. Therefore, the method to cultivate the second set of samskaras is the use of mantras.

Three mantras should be practised first thing in the morning every day: Mahamrityunjaya mantra and Gayatri mantra eleven times each, followed by the thirty-two names of Durga thrice. These are mantras that are meant for wellbeing, creativity and removal of distress from life. They have to be done in this specific sequence. This is not part of a religious sadhana, but of samskara sadhana. In religious sadhana, you can do the Gayatri mantra as many times as you have been guided by your tradition or guru, but as a sadhana to awaken creativity and influence the psyche, to increase the frequency of inner shakti, the Gayatri mantra must always be chanted after the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, and eleven times. In addition, every Saturday evening, chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra with your family 108 times.

Mantras can create an environment in which the right samskaras are acquired. Mantra is used for improving the quality of thought, vibration and energy patterns which are called the aura or 'emissions of personality' in modern terminology. Anyone who comes in contact with you during a state of positive energy is helped. It is possible to create that positive energy within your home. A house can be turned into a temple of positive energy if the people who live in it follow

a discipline and cultivate the right attitude and samskaras. In order to do this, the only requirement is to take a sankalpa to be aware of your spiritual nature and to improve the quality of your life. This is a must for everyone. Say to yourself with strong conviction that out of the twenty-four hours of the day, twenty-three hours and fifty minutes may be for the society, profession and the world, but ten minutes are for your inner awakening.

Guru as the source of samskaras

The third set of samskaras is received from the guru. *Guru*, in this context, means one who can put you in contact with the creative powers within you, which can manifest in the form of luminosity in your personality. A teacher educates you in the ways and skills of the world while the guru inspires you to connect with your spiritual nature so that you can become self-effulgent in your actions, thought and behaviour.

In the Indian tradition, children were taken to the guru to be given samskaras at the age of eight. The samskara given was called 'upanayan'. Today it has turned into a thread ceremony and its real significance has been forgotten. Its intention was to give the wisdom and the tools to connect with the source of energy inside, with the fountain of creativity within. This happened when the guru initiated the eight-year-old child in mantra, asana and pranayama. Wearing the thread was a symbolic act defining a person who is reborn by the samskaras given by the guru. The three practices given during upanayan created a spiritual awareness in the child, unknown to him. When he practised mantra, meditation became a natural part of it. When he practised asana, cultivation of awareness was a natural part of it. When he practised pranayama, a balance in the energy flows was the natural outcome.

The set of samskaras received during upanayan allowed the child to move into the next stage, into maturity of intelligence and emotions at the time of adolescence. At that time, the management of the changes in the behavioural and thought patterns were aided by spiritual counselling, with the help of a spiritual guru, not with the help of a materialistic teacher.

In adult life also, we are reminded to cultivate the right samskaras when we take the guru mantra. At this time, we are adding the components of conviction and faith to the frequency of vibration which controls and directs our life; it is a frequency of sound that we have received from a person who is thinking of our wellbeing. It comes with a positive energy and feeling from that being to us. In this way, we can build up our own set of samskaras in each stage of life. With this, we become more enlightened, emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Training in natural life

Children must also be trained to live a natural life in order to cultivate appropriate samskaras. Modern society does not allow one to be trained in living a natural life. Right from birth, children are pampered, each and every desire is fulfilled. Parents do not wish their children to go through the trials of life; they wish them to be happy. It is a good sentiment, however it does not expose the child to an environment that can help the natural growth and understanding of the intelligence and emotions by connecting with new ideas, concepts and emotions.

The way in ancient India was the gurukul system: training the children in an ashram. Parents should send their children to an ashram during vacations, whether for a week or a month. They are away from the influence of parents and the comforts and luxuries that they are used to, with a clear understanding that they have come to learn how to live a natural life.

Natural life means acquiring the wisdom of nature in life. In an ashram, where the environment is different, children are exposed to many psychic awakenings and experiences. It happens at a subtle level. No matter how hot and sweaty a person is, if he goes into a cool room the sweat will dry and he will begin to enjoy the coolness. That is what happens in an ashram. We go from a cool world into hot nature; from an air-conditioned room to a room without even a fan. The comforts and luxuries that we identify with weaken the personality. If those who bathe with hot water twelve months of the year

are asked to take a cold shower, they will immediately start sneezing. The physical strength, the immunity, has become low and the body cannot withstand any change, whether in temperature, mind, ideas or attitude.

Gurukul education was the hallmark of Indian culture and tradition in the past. Sri Rama had to go and live with his guru. He had exposure to palace life as well as natural life. Those who know how to survive and be happy in both worlds can go through crises and tribulations with strength of character. They are able to overcome difficulties and remain cheerful and optimistic all the time. Therefore, gurukul education is important for children. The learning they receive here is not intellectual, but heart oriented. It teaches you how to connect with other people.

Material training provides the intelligence with the tools to survive in life. Spiritual education enhances the efficiency and expression of the qualities of the heart and connects you to other people. It helps you to recognize the needs and the condition that other people are in. The purpose of life is fulfilled when you are able to help another person evolve and become happy; and not when you are seeking your own self-satisfaction and fulfilment. This is the difference between yoga and bhoga. Bhoga is self-fulfilment; yoga is understanding life.

The peg of meditation

Meditation always begins as a process of disconnecting from the world and connecting with other experiences. Imagine that there are two electric sockets. One socket represents the material world to which you are plugged in, and the other is the spiritual socket. All your experiences of the world are due to the flow of current through the socket which is lighting up your bulb. To take the plug out of your materialistic nature and put it in the spiritual socket, you have to extract it until disconnection takes place, the flow of current stops, then you put it in the other socket, and the current begins to flow again. In the process, a disconnection has taken place from the material world.

Meditation is the process by which you can disconnect from the material world and connect with your spiritual nature. Therefore, meditation is a must for everyone, including children. Meditation will give you a peg to tie your rope to. It will bind you to the awareness, 'I am not what I seem to be; I can be more than what I am'. This will always inspire you to seek new experiences, as the desire to become more will become an inspiration. Meditation will become the inspiration to provide you with a new set of samskaras.

Yoga samskaras

The practice of yoga will lead you to the attainment of appropriate samskaras when yoga becomes a culture in your life. Assistance can be given to children to become better human beings by teaching them yoga after the age of eight, either at home or at school. However, when you teach yoga in school, it should not be in the form of physical gymnastics or training. Allow yoga to remain yoga. Do not dilute it in the hope of quick results, for each practice of yoga has a role to fulfil in life. Therefore, try to imbibe the spirit of yoga rather than trying to change the systems of yoga to suit your needs, conveniences and expectations. They will be there, but at the same time become aware of the real progression in yoga and know that you need to cultivate the right samskaras in your child and in yourself by creating the right opportunity.

The children of Rikhia and Munger

In Munger and Rikhia, our work is mainly with children. When yoga becomes a part of the life of children from the initial stage, strength of character develops and the power of ethics and morality guide their behaviour and performance. Yamas and niyamas are expressed spontaneously. Life is balanced.

In Munger, the association of children is called Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal (BYMM). In Munger town itself, there are 2,000 children who are yoga teachers. In Munger district, there are 29,000 yoga demonstrators and teachers, who are children in the age group of seven to fourteen. All over India, we have

91,000 yoga-trained children. All of them have commitments and responsibilities, families and school. Yet, they identify with what they believe in. Sometimes, for many months they are out doing yoga work voluntarily, and when they come back they are still meritorious in their studies. This has been the outstanding achievement of BYMM. At the end of their term in BYMM, they can join Yuva Yoga Mitra Mandal, an association of young people.

Children are also cared for and guided in Rikhia. These children represent the strata of society that is totally deprived of opportunities. These deprived children have been adopted as children of yoga by Sri Swami Satyananda. If you look at them today, you will not believe that they belong to the grassroots of human society. They speak better English than you and I. They are better cultured in the arts and sciences. They know things that we do not know – about human nature, mind and personality, about everything. How does that happen? Does Sri Swami Satyananda call them over to give a class? No, yet just by creating an environment, positive energies are awakened in the life of an individual. This has been the teaching of our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, and of our guru, Swami Satyananda.

Experiment with children

Swami Sivananda used to say that a child is like a clay doll. You can give any shape to the nature, the personality of that doll while it is wet. Once it dries, you cannot alter its shape at all. Therefore, it is essential that children imbibe positive samskaras. The doors of our mind and heart are closed, but that is not so with children. They must be given the opportunity to practise yoga. The positive result of this is proven. BYMM is proof of this.

An experiment was conducted on the BYMM children, the first of its kind in the world. It was conducted in 1999 by the children themselves and 700 children participated in it. Out of the 700, 350 belonged to the yoga group and 350 to the control group. The yoga group children would come to the ashram every alternate weekend. They were taught only

three asanas and three pranayamas, which they practised for four months. Questionnaires were made to analyze several dimensions of the personality: memory, concentration, creative ability and confidence. These dimensions were studied by the children themselves.

The result of this research was encouraging and positive. In all the dimensions, the parameters showed an improvement in the yoga group compared to the control group in the ratio of 12–30%. When this research was presented at a RYE conference in the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2000, it was decided to make yoga an integral part of the syllabus in several schools in European countries. This shows that children can improve the quality of their personality through the practice of yoga.

So, give your children the opportunity to experiment with yoga. Not the yoga that you think is beneficial for them, but the yoga which they intuitively know to be beneficial for them. Then yoga can become the means to give the right samskaras to children in this material age. Along with giving it to children, if you can also incorporate yoga in your home, if parents also become a part of the yogic discipline, the child will be able to imbibe better samskaras.

No matter what you do in the course of your life, the area in which you need to focus to improve your life is the samskara area. Give yourself the opportunity to have positive, uplifting and creative samskaras by becoming aware of those that limit the free expression of your personality and nature.

Mantra and meditation are the two tools, applied universally, to understand where you are in life, and how you can become better in life. Also change the environment, make the transition from the material environment to an ashram environment for it will change the pattern of the mind and the understanding process of the mind.

Ultimately, the aim of life is to develop *satvyavahara*, appropriate behaviour, *satvichara*, appropriate thinking, and *satkarma*, appropriate action and performance to progress and succeed. Samskaras are the initial efforts to attain *satvyavahara*, *satvichara* and the ability of *satkarma*.

The beauty of this is that just the tiny spark of life, in infinite space and in infinite time gives you the possibility to evolve and you become one with the universal Self. If a spark of life in the black line of infinity does not come up, then there is no growth and no evolution. Life is an opportunity, given by God to become better and better. Make use of your life by giving yoga a chance in your life.

Question and Answer

4 March 2006, Mumbai

What is tantra yoga, and what are the practices of tantra yoga?

There is no such yoga as tantra yoga. Neither the tantric or yogic tradition is a branch known as tantra yoga. The reason is quite obvious – the entire philosophy, system and discipline of yoga springs from tantra itself and is not different from the family of the tantras. Hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, karma yoga – every yoga that you practise for physical wellbeing, mental health and happiness, and spiritual upliftment is known as tantra.

The word tantra is composed of two different words: *tanoti*, to expand, and *trayati*, to liberate. The meaning of the word *tantra* is ‘expansion and liberation’. Expansion of human consciousness, and liberation of the energies that are active in our system.

The chakras contain a specific type of *shakti* or force, energy that expresses itself through your behaviour, character, nature, body, mind and spirit. The chakras are like closed doors and windows. No air of awareness flows through them. Tantra aspires for the liberation of the energies which are locked up in the room of the chakras in your system. Therefore, the expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy is the aim of tantra.

Another example is a rubber band. When you pull the rubber band, it stretches. When you let go of the rubber band, it snaps back together. The stretching is the expansion of

consciousness, increasing the dimension through sadhanas. Letting go of the energies is the liberation of energy. To achieve this end, the most simple guidelines given in the tantras are the practices of yoga.

Yoga emerged from tantra to achieve the aim of expanding consciousness and the dormant inherent potentials in consciousness, and to liberate and free the psychic energies and the subtle expressions of prana shakti. Society classifies tantra in the form of magic or psychic manipulations. That concept does not exist in real tantra. In real tantra, there is no evil deed done, so do not confuse that with tantra.

You don't know what is kept in your house, and you call yourself the master of your own house. Your culture, your *sanskriti*, is like the house in which you live. Tantra is composed of so many different forms of experiences which are the expressions of realized beings. You should make an effort to know the reality by discovering the jewels hidden in your own house.

Tantra is the subject of developing the human personality, from the gross nature, vrittis and tendencies to the transcendental. Yoga's relationship with tantra is that of father with son, for yoga comes out of the tantras as a sadhana to fulfil the aspiration of tantra, which is the expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy.

In the *Ramayana*, it is mentioned that Lakshmana made a line on the ground to protect Sita. What are the defining lines in our life?

Sita and Rama were avatars, and they had to play a role in life. They had to live accordingly to fulfil their destinies. They played their part. They were not overwhelmed by the force of destiny; they were not swayed by what happened. They were the creators of their own destiny and they had to live a life to fulfil the objective that set for them.

In relation to yourself, all individuals are subject to rajoguna, tamoguna and sattwa qualities of life. As these different qualities manifest in your attitude, mentality, behaviour and performance, everything changes. Even the

perception changes, and there is no control over the change of these perceptions. There is no control over somebody's emotional outbursts or intellectual understanding. Therefore, nature has created certain lines which human beings should not cross, to ensure their health and happiness. These limits, set by nature, are the defining lines of your life.

When you live within the defining areas of your existence, you are happy. The moment you try to cross them, you are disturbed ethically, emotionally, intellectually. The wisdom lies in knowing what your limitations are and if you can transcend them. Make the effort but if you cannot, then accept yourself as you are.

An elephant can be clean, yet no amount of soap will ever make the elephant white. The colour of the skin will never change, no matter how much soap is scrubbed on its body. When the elephant becomes obsessive and thinks about different soaps and shampoos that could make the skin white, then there will always be strife and tension in the mind of the elephant.

Knowing the real nature stops confusions and struggles in life and allows you to understand yourself and accept yourself as you are. Once you allow yourself to understand and accept, you will meet again the parameters defined by God and nature in this world. While you are living by those parameters you are content. If you try to cross the parameters set by nature and God, then as a human being you will always find struggle and strife ahead of you.

How can I improve memory?

Improvement of memory can happen with the regular practice of nadi shodhana pranayama and along with that, the practice of *trataka*, candle-gazing, and the use of mantra to quieten the agitations of your mind. Once the major agitations are quiet, memory definitely improves.

There is a physiological and a psychological component in memory. First there is the physiological component. About ten years ago, one research was conducted at the Massachusetts' Institute of Technology in the United States. The researchers

wanted to discover an injection by which one could maintain or regain memory, which lessens with old age. They discovered that the normal hormonal secretions and glandular functions change in a person every twenty years. Every twenty years, the body goes through a major shake-up. The first hormonal change around the age of 18 and 20 is called adolescence. The second hormonal change happens around the age of 40. The third hormonal change happens around the age of 60. The fourth change happens around the age of 80. This is a twenty-year cycle. As the hormones and glands stop functioning, the lack of hormones and necessary chemicals in the brain shut down certain functions. Memory happens to be one function.

Another reason why memory becomes sluggish is that in the brain, certain vessels block the transmission of the electrical waves. When the transmission of the electrical waves is blocked, there is no signal being sent back and forth, and the block creates a block of perception and retention power. Memory becomes sluggish.

The psychological reason for the decline of memory is mental stress. When you are stressed, the mind does not function in the same optimum manner as it does when you are relaxed. The energies of the mind gather to counteract the states of stress, and other psychological functions begin to shut down. Memory is one victim of that process of shutting down.

If loss of memory is due to the psychological reason, then the practice of pranayama, trataka and ajapa japa will help. If the cause of loss of memory is due to age and shutting down of the body functions, glands and hormonal secretions, then an effective way to retain memory is to practise pawanmuktasana part 1 for six months on a regular basis every day. Through the practice of pawanmuktasana, you are able to circulate your blood and there is a continuous flow. That flow helps to clean and remove the waste matter which blocks the electrical transmissions from one centre of the brain to the other centre.

Just imagine a flowing system in the body, like the plumbing system in your house where pipes are connected to the kitchen, bathroom, the tank, wherever there is an

outlet for water. The house has a plumbing system and as long as water is flowing through those pipes, the dirt will not accumulate in the pipe. If there is no flow of water in the pipes, the water will stagnate and become full of mud and slime, and become unusable.

This is the principle you need to understand to know why pawanmuktasana can help improve the memory – by ensuring that the blood flows through all the pipe systems of the whole body. Pawanmuktasana is the most efficient, most effective yoga practice. It should be done for six months, whenever there are any hormonal changes in the body to regulate and rectify again the imbalances created by the lessening of hormones and advancing old age.

You cannot change destiny, yet you can experience youth in your old age. The true benefits of yoga are realized when you become old, not when you are young. The outcome of the sadhana which you have done during your life ensures the continuation of health. Therefore, prepare for a healthier future by incorporating yoga in your present.

How to stop worrying? Many times, we worry over small mistakes or small things continuously. Is there an instant way to stop this worry?

The answer is simple. If you remain in a hurry, there is no worry. If you remain hurried, there is no pause to worry. The answer is given in the question itself. If you dissect worry, you will discover that it is the mind unable to extract itself from a particular state of experience or impression. When the mind is unable to extract itself from that impression or that object it is associated with, then that obsessive nature is translated as worry.

This is a true story. One day a man came to me and said, “Swamiji, I am having hypertension.” I asked, “Since how long do you have hypertension?” He said, “Oh, since a few years.” I asked him, “What did you do to have this hypertension? Were you under stress, facing a conflict or problem, did you have some type of emotional or intellectual difficulty? Can you pinpoint why you were stressed at that time and why you now have hypertension as a result of that stress?” He

said, “Yes, Swamiji, I can pinpoint it. After my retirement, I was enjoying the peace and quiet in my house. One day, my daughter-in-law was vacuuming the room and I was sitting on the sofa watching television. She mumbled to herself, ‘My father-in-law sits there on the sofa like a dog’. I heard it and shortly after my hypertension developed.”

I told him, “Now, you and your attitude is the cause of your worry! You and your self-image, your self-identity being hurt.” I was thinking which yoga to teach him. I asked him, “Please tell me, when you heard the word ‘dog’, what kind of visualization did you have of the dog?” He said, “I saw myself as a street dog, scratching, skinny, limping along.”

I gave him the following advice, “Stop imagining yourself as a street dog, see yourself as a dog who lives in a comfortable home, who sleeps in an air-conditioned room, who eats three meals a day being served on time. This dog has the power to call the daughter-in-law any time and say, ‘Make tea for me’. When you travel, you travel in an air-conditioned car, wagging your tail. Be happy in the image of the dog and believe that you are the dog of a rich man.”

He looked at me and said, “What kind of spiritual advice is that? Where is the yogic intervention? Which pranayama, relaxation and meditation should I do?” I said, “Look, you don’t need anything. Just change your attitude.” He went away disappointed yet three months later, he was back. “My blood pressure is gone.” I said, “What did you do?” He said, “I saw myself as a dog of a millionaire.”

This is a real example of how a situation can make a difference to the mental attitude, and how a change of attitude can influence the knowledge and faculty of the personality. When you identify with yourself you are not able to look at yourself objectively.

The process of knowing is through meditation where you try to release all the impositions which influence your behaviour. This practice of meditation is known as *antar mouna*, inner silence. The impositions which alter your behaviour and perception become the cause of your worry. Therefore, practise *antar mouna* every day for ten minutes.

How can parents change the goal of their children? If parents change the life of a child, what happens to the fruits of earlier existences?

Parents do not change the goal of their children. The main reason is that they are not able to, they do not know how to. They are caught up in the same traps of society. Therefore, they don't have the mental clarity or spiritual power to change the goal that destiny has created for each individual.

What is the destiny of a mango seed? To become a tree, to give sweet fruits, to give shade. That is the inherent destiny of the mango tree. If you have twenty seeds you can plant two in India, two in Germany, two in Japan and so on. Where you plant those seeds is incidental. Here you confuse yourself with destiny. You think your being planted in Japan, India or Australia is your destiny. Where you are planted depends on the gardener of the garden, not on you. As a seed, you have no choice. You are just a combination of possibilities and potentials that will grow and mature when the time and conditions are right, wherever you are planted.

The same seed of a mango can lie on the ground for years and never fulfil its destiny. The gardener has not planted it. You don't have the capacity to become the gardener of your life, as you do not know what kind of flowers and fruits to plant in the garden of your life. You try to clear some area from the cactus overgrowth so that it doesn't prick you, that is the attempt everyone is making. Yet you are not able to remove that which is unnecessary from your life. You don't have the ability to see or judge yourself, so how can you manage this tamasic and rajasic garden which you have inherited?

Therefore, according to yogic tradition, in your life, you should learn to become a farmer, so that you can recognize which plants and trees are beneficial for your happiness, contentment and development and which are not. You must have the ability to discriminate between plants which give shade and those which give fruit and those which give flower, and those which flower every 10, 20, 30, 40 years of existence. As a gardener you should have the knowledge of what can be planted and what should be planted, and

needs to be planted in the garden of your life. You can do it through your effort.

There is a story: a man purchased a piece of barren land, full of rocks, weeds and stones; nothing would grow at all. He worked hard day and night to convert this barren piece of land into a flowering, colourful garden. After many years of toil and hard work, the garden was so beautiful that people used to come from all over to admire it. One day, a priest came to admire the garden and exclaimed, “God’s grace is infinite. Look at the beautiful garden he has created!” This man immediately puts his foot down and says, “Sorry, I have made the garden. You should have seen this piece of land when God owned it. It was absolutely barren!”

You have the capacity to convert the barrenness of life into a beautiful, colourful and flowering garden, therefore, be a gardener and not a warrior. A warrior will sleep in his own blood and suffering, his consciousness never still and peaceful. A gardener creates a beautiful garden with his hard work according to his liking so that people can come, admire and enjoy that result of his effort, his *purushartha*. When you become the gardener, you live yoga in your life.

Two Questions

5 March 2006

How can I stop the wandering of the mind?

Stopping the wandering of the mind is not possible. What is mind? Is mind different from you? You suffer from the influences of the mind and are asking, “Is it possible to stop the chattering of the mind?” The mind is asking whether it can stop itself.

It can happen, and is bound to happen provided you have educated and trained your mind to stop when you want it to stop, and to become active when you want it to become active. That happens through yoga sadhana. If the basic training of mind management is not there, then it is not possible to stop the mind. From time immemorial, people have been asking this question. Sri Rama asked his guru, “How can I stop the wandering of the mind?” Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, “How can I stop the chattering of the mind?” In every generation, in every life, this question has come up, not once but many times.

Solutions have been given yet you do not implement those solutions in your life. Therefore, the question is perennial and eternal. If you are able to understand the solution that has been provided for this attainment you will not ask this question any more.

The solution is simple – withdraw the senses from outside and fix them on something else. This withdrawing of senses and fixing it on something else is a process of psychological transformation: transformation of attitudes and perception.

Until and unless you understand and realize your own mental fluctuations and dissipations, and the reasons why they happen, you cannot manage your mind.

When Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, “How does one control the fluctuations of the mind?” Krishna gave Arjuna a beautiful yogic answer, which you also find in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. In Patanjali’s ashtanga yoga, mind management begins when you start to practise the pratyahara sadhanas. Dharana and meditation are other sadhanas of mind. Patanjali emphasized the progressive nature of meditation and defined the sequence of mind management. Patanjali’s theme is (1:2):

Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah.

To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.

He has outlined systems that begin with pratyahara, which has to be perfect and developed first. Then you go to dharana and perfect that. Then you move to dhyana and perfect that.

In pratyahara, the first training is to become aware of your interactions in the world of objects. This awareness comes when you begin to analyze the interaction of your body and senses and the world, as it happens in yoga nidra. In the practice of yoga nidra, for the first time in your life, you become aware of all the different parts of the body and you recognize that they exist. In the initial stage, yoga nidra connects you with your body. You only have the five toes that you have never seen individually in your life at all. Through the touch of your perception, your eyes have seen the five toes but have you ever felt the five toes? Only when you hear the instruction, ‘Become aware of the right big toe, second toe, third, fourth and fifth’. In this manner, the instructions of nyasa in yoga nidra become the first technique of pratyahara, where the senses are disconnected from their distractions outside and focused on the experience of the senses and the self inside. Each sense is withdrawn.

Impressions of vision are stopped, the eyes are shut, sounds that you normally hear through your ears are not there as the senses are being directed inwards. Smells that

would normally bother you and affect you do not bother or affect you. A posture in which you normally cannot sit for ten minutes quietly, without moving or stretching become possible for half an hour or one hour, and you are absolutely motionless as the senses are withdrawn from the outside parts of contact. This is known as withdrawing the senses.

This is the training that Krishna has given to Arjuna. To control the mind, fix your body first, sit in a meditative posture with the spine upright and straight, bring your attention to your mind, and gradually begin to withdraw the senses inwards in the same manner that a tortoise withdraws the limbs inside the shell.

*Mamaivaamsho jeevaloke jeevabhootah sanaatanah;
Manah shashthaaneendriyaani prakritisthaani karshati.*

An eternal portion of Myself having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to (itself) the (five) senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature.

This description in the *Bhagavad Gita* (15:7) is of pratyahara. How many limbs of the turtle are out of the shell? How many senses does one have? Six. There are five indriyas, five senses: sight, hearing, speech, smell and touch. They represent the two arms, two legs and the tail of the turtle. The sixth indriya, represented by the head of the turtle, is the mind (2:58):

*Yadaa samharate chaayam kurmo'ngaaneeva sarvashah;
Indriyaaneendriyaarthebhyas tasya prajnaa pratishthitaa.*

When, like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs on all sides, he withdraws his senses from the sense-objects, then his wisdom becomes steady.

The mind becomes the sixth sense as it interacts in both dimensions, the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the logical and the illogical, the gross and the transcendental. That also has to be withdrawn. Arjuna asks, "How do I do that?" Sri Krishna says, *Mayyeva mana aadhatsva* – "By fixing or applying your mind on Me." What

is this application of mind? If you apply the mind on Him, on the Supreme Self it means that you become aware of the qualities inside you that bring you to your inner nature.

The first instruction Sri Krishna gives is ‘fix your mind on Me’. This means to fix the mind on a positive quality, for the Supreme Self represents the positive, best and harmonious nature of yourself. To focus on your harmonious, excellent nature, you have to identify the qualities and attributes that are connected with your virtues (12:7–10):

*Teshaamaham samuddhartaa mrityusamsaarsaagaraat;
Bhavaami nachiraat paartha mayyaaveshitachetasaam.*

To those whose minds are set on Me, O Arjuna, truly I soon become the saviour out of the ocean of the mortal Samsara! (7)

*Mayyeva mana aadhatsva mayi buddhim niveshaya;
Nivasishyasi mayyeva ata oordhwam na samshayah.*

Fix your mind on Me only, your intellect on Me, (then) you shall no doubt live in Me alone hereafter. (8)

*Atha chittam samaadhaatum na shaknoshi mayi sthiram;
Abhyaasayogena tato maamicchaaptum dhananjaya.*

If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on Me, then seek to reach Me by the yoga of constant practice, O Arjuna! (9)

*Abhyaase’pyasamartho’si matkarmaparamo bhava;
Madarthamapi karmaani kurvansiddhimavaapsyasi.*

If you are unable to practise even this abhyasa yoga, then be intent on doing actions for My sake; by doing actions for My sake, you shall attain also perfection. (10)

Sri Krishna describes a simple method – “If you cannot have the vision of the virtues in you, if you cannot think of the virtues, if you cannot fix the mind on Me through practice, then live your life as you wish, but dedicate it to Me and you will be uplifted.”

Now these are solutions given in the *Bhagavad Gita*. These ideas are put into practice when you do pratyahara, when you perfect dharana and when you perfect dhyana. In these three systems of mind management you see the completion of what Krishna has said. Therefore, see the progression of one into the other. First you connect with what is good and beautiful in you. Second, focus on further developing those creative qualities and energies, and strive for it. Third, as you transform yourself internally cultivating in the best in you, you will attain higher realizations about your life and about yourself, and that will connect you with the divinity in you.

All three uplift a being. Therefore, it has been stated in the traditions that meditation in any form should be practised by every individual for ten minutes every day to discipline and educate the mind to become still and quiet. That way you are able to take control and charge of yourself, and you do not allow the mind to lead your awareness astray by different likes and dislikes such as aspirations, ambitions, your aggressive nature, pain, suffering and momentary contentment, happiness and illness, wealth and health, prosperity and poverty.

Yoga nidra, although it is a practice of relaxation, is also a meditation for you are continuously mentally alert. Ajapa japa is another sadhana of pratyahara. In the book of our guruji Swami Satyananda, *Meditations from the Tantras*, you will find many practices like ajapa japa, antar mouna, and yoga nidra which represent systems of pratyahara. Then there are techniques of dharana like chidakasha dharana, hridayakasha dharana, vyomapancha dharana. They prepare you for the ultimate realization of the mind in meditation. When you come to the state of meditation, you become the master of your own mind and self.

Therefore, there is no simple and instantaneous method to stop the mind wandering, rather the method is to re-educate the mind, and yoga provides the means to re-educate the mind.

God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is in each and every organism and in matter. If he is in each one then why does he allow some people to suffer, some to be poor, rich or great? Why does he favour some and punish some? If God is everywhere and the nature of God is compassionate, then why does he allow unfairness, inequality and prejudices in societies and individuals?

According to the teachings of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. God, or the shadow of God, lies in the heart of every individual who takes birth in Prakriti. God also exists according to tradition in the sentient and insentient creations. That is a reality. The other reality is that of Prakriti who is the Shakti of God. Therefore, she is equally powerful, equally omniscient, equally omnipotent and equally omnipresent.

Shakti has been given the duty to manage the stage of life, and God is the mute witness to the drama being unfolded by Prakriti on the stage of life. You are playing a role on the stage and you are witness to what is happening on the stage. The drama can be acted in which there is tragedy, attainment, happiness, passion, joy and frustration. Any kind of drama can be enacted. You are a participant, as an individual, fulfilling your destiny under the influence of Prakriti. You have to play your role.

God who is in each one of us as the observer, as the witness of the drama looks at that drama just as you would watch a movie. He will not interfere as it is not the jurisdiction of God, it is the jurisdiction of Shakti, Maya, Prakriti. Just as your father will not interfere in the acts of your mother and your mother does not like to become a barrier in the acts of your father, and similarly between husband and wife.

It is the nature of the body to take birth, grow and eventually decay and die. Nobody can change that. In the same manner, these divine forces express their nature which is for creation, destruction, transformation. Then there is this script you have to play. You are playing your script, and that script is written by your karmas, samskaras, ambitions and your character. You are playing the suffering, the pain, joy, happiness.

Here is an example: if somebody has a heart attack on stage, the witness will run up to the stage to help the person, just as you would do now if somebody had a heart attack. In the moment of final crisis, God steps in to save you. God says, "All right this drama is going a bit too far. He is not able to guide his own life, and he is now going to have a heart failure." God has to step in, "Sit down, take deep long breaths. Calm down and I will be with you until you are strong enough to manage your own life again."

Do not confuse the role of God in your life and the role of Prakriti in your life. It is not God who is giving you suffering. God has given you the opportunity to transform and overcome your own karmas and samskaras so that you can perform the right script in your life. Prakriti is giving you different events in life so you can realize and recognize what your limitations are and how you can transcend them.

God appears in the final crises, there is no question about that. God appeared to Draupadi after she had sought help in all directions and failed. When she surrendered, God came to save Draupadi. God will come to help you in the time of crisis and God will never allow you to fall, because it is the final crisis that brings you closest to the presence of God. At the moment of final crisis, you do not walk on your own feet, rather you are carried in the arms of God. Therefore, do not look at the suffering and joy from the human perspective of cravings, desires and fulfilment of ambitions. When you identify with them it is your subjective perception and understanding, yet it is not the reality. The reality is that they have made you what you are. You have to experience the presence of divinity in that stage and then you will know the difference between surrender and desire.

The last learning in the life of every person is surrender, and beyond that there is no other searching, no other learning. When you are unable to surrender initially, nature forces you to surrender yourself when you die. Those who surrender before the time of death live the eternal life.

Tradition of Guru-Shishya

6 March 2006

The tradition of guru-shishya gives an indication of the direction in which a human being has to evolve over the course of time. Without evolution there would be no nature and no creation. Everything is subject to evolution and development. Since birth the baby body grows to the size of an adult body. Just as everything evolves in this life from the time of your birth until the time of your death, consciousness also goes through evolution.

Since the beginning of history, people have thought about spiritual awareness: What is it? What is the experience? What is the outcome? Is it the betterment or deterioration of the qualities of the individual? The people who thought about this subject of spiritual life have defined different methods. A person living in the sensorial, material world can discover their other nature, in which there is not only absolute identification with the gross world, but also awareness of the transcendental dimension within the gross nature. One who can have the experience of the transcendental nature in the gross dimension is known as a siddha, a rishi, seer, yogi, or sadhaka.

It is the aim of any kind of spiritual practice to realize a way to become free from the pressures, tensions and stresses of society, and the personal irrationalities and insecurities. To know how not to be influenced by the association with the world of objects – the outcome being happiness, contentment, fulfilment of the desires, and freedom from depression, frustration, anxiety, lethargy, hatred, jealousy and anger.

As an individual you have the possibility to experience this freedom from the bondages created by the mind. Once you are freed from the bondages, you experience inner freedom which is spiritual awareness – and you know how to live a harmonious, balanced life. The rishis, sannyasins and sadhus dedicated their lives to experiment with themselves. They developed the method by which a person can come to a point of self-awareness, and through the cultivation of self-awareness to connect with the cosmic awareness.

There are many teachers and centres in the world who work for the betterment of society and the individual, yet their work stops after them, for they do not have a tradition which supports them. Then there are those who still have their own life, family, society and who connect with a spiritual tradition. The understanding of the spirit of the tradition gives them more strength and encouragement along with the courage to sacrifice their life for the upliftment of humanity. What is this true sacrifice? One who is striving to overcome and transcend the selfish nature makes the real sacrifice. One who makes the effort to connect with the universal nature makes a true sacrifice, striving to overcome the selfish nature which is subject to ego, attachments, desires, greed, jealousy and all other survival instincts in this world.

The spirit of the tradition has always guided the gurus throughout the ages. The guru *parampara*, the tradition to which we belong, begins from the ancient times of Sage Vasishtha who is the founder of a tradition of thinkers that has inspired the spiritual evolution of humanity.

The lineage of Brahmanidya

This guru parampara begins with Brahmanidya. *Brahmanidya* means the knowledge of developing consciousness, knowledge of the supreme. If you translate the words brahma vidya individually, by looking at their Sanskrit roots you will discover that it means ‘knowing the process of merging into ever-expanding consciousness’. This is the literal meaning of the word Brahmanidya, wherein the philosophy and practice are contained. One science established as Brahmanidya is yoga.

As a recognized science Brahmaavidya can help transmute the gross consciousness into transcendental consciousness by following certain disciplines which influence body, mind and emotion. They can transform the tamasic into a sattwic quality, give the ability to overcome the limitations of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind, give the possibility to express and experience the full yogic potential inherent in a human being. This subject has been identified as yoga.

Sage Patanjali or any other sage of the past has never defined the full yoga. Maharishi Patanjali did his doctorate thesis on the subject of ashtanga yoga; that is not the complete yoga. When you do a doctorate in any university, you will not cover the entire subject that you have learned. It will be a specific idea-oriented thesis. In the same way, no rishi has ever defined the whole subject of yoga. They have written a thesis using a specific idea to put forward a point, create an understanding of one level of looking at yourself, of one nature of realizing yourself.

Sage Patanjali did his doctorate on the subject of raja yoga, the ashtanga yoga. Sage Gheranda did his doctorate in hatha yoga. The name of the doctorate is *Gheranda Samhita*. Sage Swatmarama did his thesis which is called *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. Sage Sandilya and Sage Narada did their theses on the subject of bhakti yoga, emotion management – the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* and the *Sandilya Bhakti Sutra*. Theses have been written not only on spiritual subjects but also on these subjects. Sage Kanad did his thesis on atoms and the atomic nature of human beings. Today, Einstein is called the father of atomic science, but in India Sage Kanad is called the father of atomic science. If you compare his books with any book on physics and atomic theory, you will find more information in his literature than in all the books of the world put together. Like this many sages did their theses on yoga. For the Kali Yuga, Sri Krishna gave the instructions to Arjuna, declaring that the teachings that are coming out lead to Brahmaavidya. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a thesis on yoga – *Brahmaavidya yogashastra*.

Sri Krishna focused mainly on karmas and how to transcend the bondage of karmas. He spoke of recognizing the

different facets of human nature by describing the qualities of sattwa, rajas and tamas, and the qualities of a pure human being who has transcended the gross nature. That person involved with these qualities is the real spiritual identity that God accepts. All the qualities required for spiritual awakening have been described in Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

These are examples of historical persons in ancient times who did their theses on specific subjects required by society at that time to transcend the gross human nature. The first one, in this lineage of Brahmavidya is Sage Vashishta, Narayanam Padmabhavam Vasishtha, and the lineage that begins with Vashishta, Shakti to Prashai, the rishis to whom Vasishtha was the spiritual father. From Prashai it came to Vyasa who is considered to be the first poet of the world. Rishi Veda Vyasa was the first rishi to codify the Vedas into four different books. He was the first to write the history of humanity in the Puranas. Without him, today the identity of Indian civilization would have been totally lost. After Vyasa comes Sukhdev, Vyasam Shukham. Sukhdev is a historical person who was born with spiritual enlightenment at the age of sixteen. You live in your mother's womb for nine months and then are born. Sukhdev lived in his mother's womb for sixteen years of his life. He did not want to be born according to the story.

Origins of sannyasa

In Kali Yuga begins the tradition of sannyasins. In this tradition of renunciates Shankaracharya came first, one of the biggest luminaries and intellectuals. His lineage continues; Shankaracharya organized the sannyasa tradition and in that the Saraswati tradition has the responsibility to preserve all knowledge for posterity. The Saraswati sannyasins have lived up to it until today. Shankaracharya's four disciples became the acharyas of the four institutions in different parts of India and were given the title of 'Shankaracharya'.

Another lineage of renunciates comes from Paramahansa Dattatreya. The tradition of paramahansa begins from him. The paramahansa sannyasins follow the sadhana as

enunciated by Dattatreya and therefore they are considered to be free from any obligations to society.

These two traditions of paramahansa and sannyasins became one in the time of Dakshinamurti, who is the avatar of Dattatreya. Since he belonged to the Saraswati order, our lineage and recognition comes from the Shankaracharya tradition. Since we belong to the paramahansa order as well that recognition comes from the lineage of Dattatreya. It is not the person who becomes immortal, it is the teaching that becomes immortal. The person is a momentary wave in the sea of time. As soon as that wave dies down the person also ceases to exist; only knowledge, wisdom continues. This knowledge comes back again and again to take humanity to different dimensions.

According to tradition, yoga is considered to be a shastra. *Shastra* means eternal teaching. The entire subject of yoga is treated as a shastra. There are many subjects in this shastra, and the eternal teachings are not independent entities like raja yoga, hatha yoga, karma yoga, dhyana yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, nada yoga, laya yoga. All the traditional yogas contribute to the eternal teachings or yogashastra; they all cater to a particular need of an individual.

Our paramguru, Swami Sivananda used to say that inside every person exist three qualities: intelligence, emotion, and action or performance. They are the qualities of head, heart and hands. If you have the quality of the head and the heart but not of action, you cannot be a human being. To be a human being there has to be an integration of the three qualities of head, heart and hands. The different yogas cater to the needs of the head, heart and hands. If you look at a human body and the different dimensions or levels of perceptions in the human existence, you can imagine the same number of yogas.

Yoga in ancient times was known as *yoga vidya*, the knowledge of yoga. It is considered to be Brahmayidya as it has the possibility to become yoga sadhana. The knowledge of yoga is not only philosophical, intellectual or rational, it

can also become a sadhana. *Sadhana* means you apply yourself to bring about transformation in the distracting influences of life. You apply yourself to cultivate peace, harmony and balance in yourself.

From a philosophy, yoga vidya has the inherent possibility to become yoga sadhana when you apply yourself. From yoga sadhana it also has the possibility to become yoga *jeevan padhati*, a yogic lifestyle. Lifestyle has the possibility to become yoga *sanskriti*, the culture of yoga. Yoga has four progressions, four stages. Ninety percent of yoga practitioners stay at the level of yoga vidya, trying to know yoga for their own benefit, their health, stress management, fulfilment of personal expectations and desires – most of you are confined to the level of pecking at yoga. You peck one grain of yoga here, another one there.

Most of you are peckers trying to figure out where you are, the physical connection with the mind and the mind's connection with the spirit. Sometimes you do not understand. Sometimes the concept is alien to your material conditioning, cultural belief, your mentality and association of ideas. That is human nature. Some have been able to connect with the experience of yoga yet have made this effort only to fulfil a particular requirement and to change a particular conditioning of body, mind or emotions, but some strive to improve the overall quality of life.

Most of you practise yoga to overcome inner stresses and imbalances. Some people practise yoga to learn how to concentrate and focus their mind, and this helps to manage their own stresses and pressures in life. Some people learn yoga with the idea of obtaining some power or *siddhis*. Most people take up the subject of yoga according to their mentality. Whatever your mentality may be, that is what you are.

Progression of yoga

There are different ideas that you connect with yoga. If the connection becomes deep, not superficial, then yoga becomes not only a practice but a sadhana. If the connection is superficial, yoga is only a practice that one does for a limited

period of time in the morning or in a class. Those people are peckers. However, those who adopt yoga as a sadhana make the conscious effort to qualitatively develop their life, their mind, emotions, experiences and performance in life. When they develop this qualitative change, then the creative nature, the *shakti* and force from within them, the dormant centres of the brain and the dormant centres of energy and consciousness, wake up.

According to science, only a portion of the human brain is active today. Ninety percent of the brain is in a state of dormancy, only ten percent is active. According to psychology, you are aware only of a fraction of the field of consciousness. The unconscious and subconscious is only speculation. The superconscious is only speculation. You are only aware of those areas of your consciousness that interact with the physical senses, or have some relationship with the physical senses, like memories which have a relationship with the physical senses. Therefore, only a limited personality is active at present. It becomes possible through yoga to awaken more areas of the dormant creative forces in us. This is known as the awakening of chakras and of kundalini. This happens when yoga is treated as a sadhana to qualitatively improve the function of head, heart and hands, and then yoga becomes a lifestyle.

The yogic lifestyle is not difficult. It is not a lifestyle of renunciation. It is a lifestyle of understanding your relationships and associations with the world of objects, the senses, and people whom you consider your own. That is the yogic lifestyle. If you can be aware of yourself, your reactions and performances, and try to better them every moment, yoga becomes a lifestyle. When you are seeking excellence in whatever you do in life, after perfecting the awakening of energy, then that excellence is the outcome of the lifestyle and becomes the hallmark of the human personality. Then the yoga culture is developed where you are able to live in two dimensions: the material and the spiritual. This is not just scriptural talk. There are examples in history of people who have achieved this, and their inspiration continues to motivate us until today.

Start your journey anywhere, yet know that yoga begins as yoga practice and becomes yoga sadhana as you go deeper. When you fulfil the sadhana, yoga becomes a lifestyle, and when you express what you have gained in your life, it becomes the culture, the sanskriti, and the samskara of yourself.

Progression of Yoga

March 2006

When you practise yoga with the idea of sadhana, you have to adhere to the requirement or need of body, mind and spirit, or the needs of head, heart and hands. To access these different areas of your personality and expression, you need to incorporate different items in your sadhana, your daily practice.

Three-mantra sadhana

First: when you wake in the morning, before doing your asana, or having your breakfast, before having your bed tea, practise three mantras which will take you about five to seven minutes.

The first mantra is the Mahamrityunjaya mantra to be chanted eleven times. According to yogic tradition it is the mantra for healing. It heals the body, mind, emotions, the spirit and generates an overall feeling of wellbeing. It is such a beautiful way to start the day by connecting through vibrations with your inner self, rather than being irritated with the loud ring of the alarm clock.

Then chant eleven times the Gayatri mantra for developing inner creativity. This mantra is not for children but for grown-ups, for they lack creativity in all spheres of life. Grown-ups have no creativity; they are too conditioned, and cannot see beyond their own limitations. They cannot find a way and are disturbed when there is a block on the path. There is confusion and conflict, distress and distractions, attached to their personality. Children are different in nature. When

you practise the Gayatri mantra its spiritual purpose, spiritual sankalpa is to awaken the dormant creativity of emotions and intellect, or of head and heart.

The third mantra to be chanted three times are the 32 names of Durga. These mantras create a vibration, power, energy within you which overrides the conditions of stress in life and there is an eruption of de-stress.

After the three mantras, you go about your business, do your yoga asanas and pranayamas, have your breakfast, and go to work.

Evening sadhana

When you return home in the evening to release the stresses and tensions accumulated over the day, do not sit in front of the television and watch a soap opera for entertainment. Go to your room, lie down and practise yoga nidra for half an hour, for it will help you to relax the unconscious and subconscious stresses. It will make the mind clear, remove fatigue and tiredness of the body and nerves, it will infuse a little bit more energy. Then go to the party, have your dinner, visit friends, watch TV, chat on the phone, surf the internet, whatever you want.

At night before sleeping do ten minutes of meditation. In this way you can develop a routine in your mind that will balance the mental behaviours and emotional expressions during the day which come up as reactions and disturb your inner clarity and peace.

This is how the program should be made for yourself, in which two components are important – one, the chanting of the three mantras in the morning, for they give a direction to the mental forces, to life, to consciousness and your attempts to perfect yoga. Two is ten minutes of meditation just before sleep. If you feel too shy to meditate in your room because somebody in the next bed is watching, then you can go to the bathroom, do your meditation there, wash your hands and feet and go to bed and to sleep. Whatever way, do it.

You have to understand one thing, that day and night make up twenty-four hours. Out of these twenty-four hours

you have set aside twenty-three hours and fifty minutes for your world, selfish nature, family, ambitions, profession, job, entertainment, pleasure, and for your suffering. The remaining ten minutes is set aside for your meditation. During that time, you do not identify with what you have done in the last twenty-three hours and fifty minutes. Close the door to those hours and maintain the compartment of ten minutes for your time, space and effort to discover yourself.

Mantra sadhana

The meaning of the word *mantra* is vibration which can liberate the mind from its own bondages – *mananat trayate iti mantra*. The vibration which frees the mind from self-created illusions. The mantras given in yoga are different to religious mantras. The mantra *Ram* existed much before Rama was even born. The mantra *Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya* existed much before Krishna was born. Mantras are realizations of states of energy and consciousness by yogis in deep states of meditation. These mantras in the form of vibrations awaken the dormant centres. The religious imposition came much later when the individual associated certain ideas with events and persons. The mantras that are used to develop oneself and to experience the purer dimension of consciousness are the yoga mantras.

There are two ways of practising these mantras. One is in form of sadhana, the other is spontaneous. Mantra sadhana is sitting down in meditation and repeating the mantra, the specific number of times that you have been told to, with the mala. The mala anchors the mind to the body. The mantra becomes the hot air which lifts the balloon of the mind into the sky. You use the mantra and mala in meditation, and remain anchored to the earth with the use of mala. This is mantra sadhana.

Sannyasa diksha

Sannyasa does not mean renunciation. The literal meaning of the word *sannyasa* is ‘to place in a trust’, to place your abilities in a trust, to create a trust in life as you do in society. Those

trusts fulfil a specific purpose where you invest your money. In the same way, sannyasa is placing your abilities and qualities in a trust for a specific use or attainment, which is the evolution or the gradual transcendence of the gross human nature and the experience of the cosmic nature in the gross form.

This identity of sannyasa does not come with initiation only, or by wearing the robes only, it comes when you try to cultivate the good and positive in you. Those who can remain true to their commitment to develop the good and positive, ultimately experience the highest in sannyasa. Those who are not sincere in their commitment, for them sannyasa is just a membership into a spiritual club. That should not be your attitude.

Application and safeguarding

Yoga is a wholistic science, for you will have to come to a point where you see yourself as a complete unit: body, mind, emotion and spirit. Since yoga has come in the forefront, it has gone through many changes. In the early 1960s, yoga was seen as a technique to trim the body, reduce the waistline and beautify the body to achieve physical grace. In the 1970s, yoga became the means of managing one's stress, and it became a tool for stress management. In the 1980s, the therapeutic benefits of yoga were discovered and the applications of yoga for therapy and healing started; yoga started to become part of alternative therapies. Also in the 1980s, yoga was explored for the purpose of awakening psychic potentials and developing the extrasensory perceptions. So by the 1990s, yoga was seen for the first time as a technique which could help the body and the mind.

From the year 2000 onwards, yoga became an academic subject, and beginner's courses, master courses, postgraduate courses certificate and diploma courses were offered. The subject of yoga psychology is now being taught in several universities in India. Today yoga is an academic subject and at the same time it has become the means to fill the needs of the individual. However, in the coming days there is going to be a decline of yoga, for the growth of yoga has not been

managed properly. The syllabi made for yoga teaching do not consider the human being at all.

In the 1960s there were the first yoga teachers to promote yoga in education and as a result in Europe we have a successful movement called RYE, Research on Yoga in Education. The function is to teach yoga to school teachers and college teachers so that they can teach yoga to their students in the classroom environment. This movement is recognized by the UNESCO as well. In France seventy thousand teachers have been trained in yoga education principles.

Whenever the government or state try to think about the spiritual welfare of a person they always fail. They look with the eyes of administrators, bureaucrats and manipulators. This trend is coming and the yogic principle is going to become the cause of yogic decline in the next ten, fifteen to twenty years. Society will reject yoga. People will reject yoga. Some ill effects of yoga will be felt by those who are practising without any guidance and proper training. Those people who do not go through proper understanding and training today are going to suffer tomorrow. Therefore, as yoga teachers it has to be your prime responsibility to understand the scope of yoga and the application of yoga in the right manner.

We have been asked to create the minimum standard of yoga teaching so that the teacher has the basic understanding, knowledge and concept of the growth of yoga. Accordingly, the practices can be tailored to present the real teaching of yoga when there is a decline in yoga. There has to be those people who have the commitment and conscience to bring the right teaching to society. Then the growth of yoga will be much more balanced, homogeneous and integrated.

True yogic vision

You are not learning yoga to satisfy your curiosity but to understand and live the full scope of yoga. Therefore, do not just learn yoga to practise yourself, but learn yoga to live it yourself. Don't learn yoga to experiment with yourself, learn yoga to experience yourself. If you have this direction, you will be able to realize yoga as it should be, for the

overall development of the human personality. Yoga is a pragmatic subject, and people who practise yoga should be also pragmatic. If a blind man has the desire to see the sun, is that the priority of the need in his life? The real need for the blind man is to have sight, vision. If the vision is there, there is no need to have the desire to see the sun – he will be able to see the sun and the whole beauty of creation.

In this way you have to look at yourself. You may desire to become all-powerful, omnipotent, experience God, have God-realization, go into the deepest states of meditation. This desire is nobody's priority and nobody's need; it is only an ambition. The need is to change the tamasic nature into a sattwic nature. When you become sattwic all realization is there. Therefore, as yoga teachers you have to be pragmatic and practical in your approach to life, only then you will be able to advance.

Work to discover your body, your mind, feelings and the spirit. Work to experience the connection between all dimensions of life and cultivate the good, virtuous and beautiful in yourself, to become an example through your spiritual attainments. I wish you all the best on your yogic journey.

Yoga Sadhana

8 March 2006, Nasik

Yoga has to be seen from various perspectives according to our interest, involvement and desire to experience yoga in life. Some people practise yoga for realigning their bodies, overcoming physical, somatic, psychosomatic distresses, overcoming tensions and stress. They practise yoga to fulfil their needs. It is a valid approach to yoga.

Yoga sadhana

However, you must also think how you can achieve the aims that have been described in yoga. When you look at yoga from this perspective then your focus shifts from practice to sadhana. You practise yoga with the objective to fulfil a particular requirement or condition in your life; you practise yoga sadhana when you keep the objectives of yoga in mind and want to achieve them.

The first component of yoga sadhana is discipline, organization of your life, routines, behaviours, attitudes, aspirations and directions in life. This reorganization of your life's expressions leads to sanyam, which is the higher discipline that yoga practitioners aspire for. One who has attained sanyam is the total master for sanyam represents perfection, excellence, thoughtful behaviour full of wisdom. There are many definitions of the word 'sanyam'. *Sanyam* is the final discipline that you aspire for as a yogi, and it is sensorial, intellectual, emotional and spiritual.

Organization of your routines in life, reconstructing the priorities, harmonizing your outer environment with your aspirations related to family and personal growth is known as *anushasana* – reorganizing or restructuring life. That is the first role of yoga: *Atha yoga anushasana*. The second objective of yoga is managing the disturbed mental states or mental conditions; and the third is to become aware of oneself as a luminous being. When you are practising sadhana you become aware of these three aspirations of yoga: personal discipline and organization of life, managing the modifications of the mind and discovering the creative, harmonious, luminous Self.

Athah yoga anushasanam.

Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah.

Tadaa drashtuh svaroope'vasthaanam.

When you have these three objectives of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (1:1–3) in mind, then yoga has to give you the experience of these three objectives and not only fulfil those objectives which are oriented towards your personal needs and aspirations. When these three objectives are being fulfilled, yoga begins to be part of the lifestyle of the individual. It is an experience of yoga as a lifestyle not as something that you do for a specific time. You begin to express yogic behaviour and discipline; you begin to live yogic organization. Finally, lifestyle evolves into a culture.

Pratyahara

There are two sockets in the wall: one represents the world, the other yoga. The materialistic behaviour and nature, where the inherent qualities of life manifests as tamasic and rajasic, and where the expressions of the mind are coloured by the forces of the senses and personal ambitions, is the socket of the world. The other socket is spiritual life, where the mind expresses the sattvic qualities, where the mind is free from its negative associations with the world of objects, where you do not feel, experience or nurture greed, hatred, jealousy or anger, rather there is balance, harmony and the witnessing component.

The flood of energy connected to socket of the world has to be extracted and put in the other socket. The process of extraction is known as *viyoga* and the process of reconnection to the other socket is known as yoga. The aspiration is to practise yoga yet first you have to experience viyoga, the extraction of attachment. The process of enabling extraction of attachment is known in raja yoga as pratyahara. Now with all the senses connected to the world, you are experiencing the world. However, when you begin to withdraw the senses from their associations with the objects, you are pulling back your mental peace, your awareness and disconnecting from the influences of the senses, and that is known as *pratyahara*.

The entire practice of asana and pranayama should be combined with the attitude of pratyahara. When the attitude of pratyahara combines with posture, the outcome is stability and comfort. When pratyahara is combined with the practice of pranayama, the outcome is the realization of the pranic body. In this manner pratyahara has to be associated with different practices, it is not an isolated technique. Asanas contain components of pratyahara in them. The theory and practice of pranayama has components of pratyahara in them. The practice of relaxation, yoga nidra, is pratyahara in itself. Meditation begins with pratyahara. The process of becoming aware is the beginning of pratyahara.

Exercise: Close your eyes, and see everything that you have been seeing for the last half an hour as you have been guided before. Try to do the same. You have been seeing the entire stage for the last half an hour. Can you recreate the same things in your mind?

You were asked to look at the picture and recreate the same whole picture. That shows the response of the active, knowing mind. Your awareness does not move to those areas of perception which are minor; it only captures the major parts. This shows that the conscious perception is not able to fill in the whole of an image. It is an example of how much expressive power the mind has.

Could you do it, see the whole stage in front of your closed eyes? If not, that is absence of awareness from the senses. You see yet you are not aware that you are seeing, you hear yet you are not aware that you are hearing, you smell yet you are not aware that you are smelling, you feel yet you are not aware that you are feeling. When discomfort or some attraction comes that suddenly focuses your attention, then you take your awareness there. The purpose of sadhana is to incorporate pratyahara in asana, pranayama and different meditative techniques to awaken the knowledge of the subtle sheaths or *koshas* of the body – physical, pranic, mental and consciousness.

Your sadhana must reach these four dimensions. Asana must influence the physical body, *annamaya kosha*, the pranic body, *pranamaya kosha*, mental body, *manomaya kosha*, the consciousness body, *vijnanamaya kosha*. Pranayama must influence the physical body, *annamaya kosha*, the pranic, mental and consciousness body. Relaxation and meditation must also go through the physical body, prana, mind and consciousness. Then you are practising yoga sadhana.

Three-mantra sadhana

Yoga sadhana has to incorporate the components of mantra, posture, respiration, pratyahara and dharana. We include the component of mantra and more specifically the three mantras Mahamrityunjaya, Gayatri and the 32 names of Durga. The sound syllables of these mantras have been seen to create a specific frequency of vibration when chanted. Some mantras act at the subconscious level stimulating the subconscious. Some mantras act at the unconscious level stimulating and activating the unconscious.

The vibration frequency of the first mantra, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, stimulates the healing centres in the brain. Therefore, the chanting of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is recommended for healing the physical nature. If there is any deficiency, distress, illness or imbalance, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra will help. If there is psychological, emotional distress, it will help as the frequency, the vibrations

of the mantra heal the positive aura. The aura exists around everyone. Even in the absence of the physical body the aura continues to exist for some time.

For example, when you cut a leaf in half, then put the half-leaf in a Kirlian machine to take a picture, you will not see half a leaf, you will see the full leaf. The body of the full leaf will be captured by the camera although physically you have only half a leaf. Therefore, even in the absence of the physical body, the pranic body which is affected by vibrations and frequencies exists. Its existence is not in the physical body. When the mantras and their frequencies tune in to the healing centres, the emanations of energy become strong. They are able to overcome the negative energy created by the mind, thoughts and fears.

The second mantra is the Gayatri mantra. The frequency of the Gayatri mantra has been seen to increase the receptivity of the mind. It enhances the thinking power, memory, and the ability of understanding. The frequencies of the Gayatri mantra affect the learning centres of the brain. The Mahamrityunjaya plus the Gayatri mantras work on the subconscious level.

The third mantra is the 32 names of Durga. Durga mantras, especially when they are bija mantras, influence the unconscious mind and remove the seeds of distress inherent in vasanas, your ahamkara, and your tamasic nature. These seeds that cause distress in life are removed with the Durga mantras.

The first thing in the morning these three sets of mantras are to be practised. They create a positive environment around and within you. Then during the day, you incorporate the practice of asanas, pranayamas, relaxation and meditation at home so they become an integrated part of your lifestyle.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Is life an expression of karma?

Yes, a life is an expression of karma. Life is there to fulfil your dharma. Once you have fulfilled all the dharmas in life and become free from them, liberation is attained, called enlightenment. That liberation is from the cycle of birth and death. Life is subject to karma all the way from the first step to the last.

This karma happens in three dimensions, external-sensorial, internal-mental, psychological and spiritual. The outcome of the karma which we experience is known as destiny. If you plant a flower tree, eventually flowers will grow. If you plant a thorny tree, thorns will come. If you plant a fruit tree, fruits will come. If you plant just a green shrub, it will only remain green, for each one according to karma lives their destiny. Destiny is recognizing the collection of the karmic output, not the karmic input. According to that karmic output comes the direction life is going to take. Therefore, life is an expression of a continuous karma.

The soul is accompanied by mind and sensory perceptions, when it enters the body. Mind and sensory perceptions define the level of evolution that has happened until then, and the point from where you will be starting the journey this time. That is all. The conditionings of the mind and sensory perceptions that you have been endowed with when they accompany the spirit into the body, they define you; they will make up your personality. Personality is made before the intellect kicks in. Intellect kicks in when you go to school and learn a b c d, $2+2=4$, $1+1=2$. Your mentality, personality, character and possible future directions have been defined by the karmas which have shaped your destiny.

Today you plant a seed, tomorrow it becomes a tree, day after tomorrow there is a flower, day after tomorrow there are fruits, then day after tomorrow it dies. The same thing happens with the body. The experience of karma happens in the direction of time. Body, mind and evolution are

subject to the influences of time during the journey of our life. Therefore, in Indian traditions emphasis has been on improving the karmas.

If you are able to improve the karmas today, your perceptions, attitudes, vrittis, character, nature, responses, the whole quality of your mind, will greatly benefit your personality and the environment. Preference has been given to improving the karmas today, as you are reaping what you had sown in the past. Therefore, the concept of satkarma is very much part of the dharmic traditions of India – to perform universal *satkarma*, right action in word and in deed.

Is there anything that can be done against terrorism?

There is nothing you can do about terrorists. You cannot fight them; you cannot change them. Look at the story of Ravana, Kamsa or Jarasandh. Even kings were terrorists. The expression of the tamasic nature is anger, aggression, and with the sattvic nature you are expressing compassion. Fear is the water for the tree of terrorism. The expression of *tamas* is watered by fear, the expression of *sattwa* is watered by love.

Today's lifestyle is tamasic. If you add to the sattvic side, the tamasic side becomes lighter. Focus on the positive, the sattvic qualities. When you improve, your family will improve, when your family improves, your neighbourhood will improve, when your neighbourhood improves, society will improve, when the society improves the community, the state, the nation and the whole world will improve. Spiritual sciences are the needs of the day. No other science can indicate the process by which you can cultivate virtues in life, and by cultivating virtues overcome the tamasic expressions, even of terrorism.

If I have been initiated by some other guru or I have accepted somebody else as my guru who is not present in the physical form, can I take mantra diksha?

Mantra creates a connection between two people and two people have to be alive, not dead. The connection has to develop from that. If you have accepted somebody who

has ceased to exist, no problem. They have inspired you to spiritual life. Love them, respect them. You can also take mantra initiation from a living guru and see this living guru as an extension of the other one. Then you have no conflict or confusion.

If your guru is alive, even if he or she is a householder guru, not a sannyasi guru, if they have initiated you in some form of mantra, you should continue to use that mantra in your sadhana. So if the guru has ceased to live in the body, you can take diksha, if the guru is alive do not take diksha. That is the principle.

What happens to one's karmas when the guru enters one's life?

You have written a book and want to publish it. What will you do? You take the manuscript to the editor or publisher, he will read it and cross out sentences, remove inappropriate or superfluous pages, and chapters are shuffled from here to there. After editing is done it goes for printing. The book you had written has been changed by the editor to make it better, more understandable, cohesive, logical, to create links between different events and chapters, to bring personalities and different events together. The book is published in your name

Now transpose this. You have a book of life, and according to your understanding, it is going nicely, no problem at all – good job, good career, good family, good children, good house, good factory. Everything is fine. You think you have the perfect manuscript to publish. You take your book to the guru, he looks at the book and says that this chapter is superfluous and that sentence is not necessary. When you visit your guru, your book is in the process of editing, all the time. The guru will tell you to do this and not do that. You are all the time in the process of being edited as is the book of your life, and therefore no book is being published. Life is a book. This is the reality and you have to understand it in that manner.

When the guru sees the book of life then the karma changes; editing of the book takes place by the guru. In regard

to guru seva, it is the fulfilment of the editing. When the guru says, “No don’t do this,” it is not that the guru does not trust you. It is not a question of trust; it is the editing process that is happening in the manuscript of your book.

In this process the guru has become the editor of life. Some people make the guru a counsellor which makes their life seem dependant on the guru: Can I change my house? Do I have your permission? I want to buy a new flat for my business, do I have your permission? I am looking for a wife for my son. Please look at the picture, see the house, give your blessings. In this manner the guru becomes a puppet of the whims of the disciple. When guru becomes the puppet of the whims of the disciple then the relationship does not exist.

Paramahamsaji says clearly that people want to make their guru in their own image. They don’t want to accept the guru as he is. When you want to make the guru in your image then the true relationship doesn’t exist. The disciple is one who is able to surrender without any reservation, completely. Only then can the karmas be changed and be edited. It will not happen before for you have surrendered.

2007

Chennai

Bangalore

Delhi

Role of the Ashram

20 February 2007, Chennai

What is yoga? What is ashram? What is yoga ashram? Yoga is a lifestyle in which your entire personality is performing at optimal level. Our paramguru Swami Sivananda said that a human being expresses the qualities of head, heart and hands in the course of his journey in life. Head represents the intellect, heart represents the sentiments, hands represent performance, action. The normal social environment and conditioning sometimes highlights the head component and thus there is imbalance in the heart and hands. Sometimes they highlight the heart component and there is imbalance in the head and hands. Sometimes they highlight the hand component and there is imbalance in the heart and mind. When there is imbalance at any of these levels, then *kleshas* enter life, suffering, depression, anxiety, frustration, greed and avarice. Tamoguna comes to life, and sattwa guna is left far behind. Tamoguna represents the disturbances in life: physical in the form of disease, mental in the form of unfulfilled expectation, and spiritual in the form of getting away from the experience of inner peace and happiness.

The aim of yoga

To live a successful life, the qualities of head, heart and hands have to be integrated and to come together. That is the purpose of yoga, to make an integrated and awakened personality. This integration is attained through anushasana – *atha yoga anushasanam*, through learning and perfection

of learning. The word *anushashan* can mean instruction or discipline. This word has many different meanings in different contexts. The main theme of the word *anushashan* is learning and perfecting the learning, knowing and the perfection in knowledge. This is yoga sadhana which has to be for the body, mind, emotions and for the spirit.

When there is hunger in the body, you satisfy the hunger with food, when there is hunger in the mind, you satisfy the mental hunger with happiness, when you are happy you are mentally satisfied. You satisfy the emotional hunger with love. You satisfy the spiritual hunger with the experience of bliss or *ananda* and peace or *shanti*. These are the different hungers that people have. Yoga has to be adopted to cover these different areas: body, mind, emotions and spirit.

Therefore, yoga is not merely hatha yoga, it is also kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, raja yoga and mantra yoga. Each form of yoga helps in the awakening of a particular dimension of human personality, expression and behaviour. The need for the head is different from the needs of the hands. The needs of the hands are different from needs of the heart. The need of the heart is different from the needs of the other parts of the body. How can one say that a human being is only intellectual and God-realization is an intellectual process? Impossible! How can one say that God-realization is only bhakti, and nothing beyond bhakti? Impossible. God-realization is an experience of an awakened and integrated human personality.

We all are blind and want to see the sun, yet that is not our need and requirement, that is our ambition and desire. For a blind person to see the sun is not a need, it is an aspiration. The need is to have vision, eyesight. With eyesight a blind person can see the entire creation in total glory, splendour and colour. Headache is a symptom of tension and stress in life, in the same manner, God-realization is a symptom of an awakened sattwic personality. Therefore, the effort in yoga is to know oneself and to give oneself good samskaras. Whether you do that through meditation, kriya yoga, japa, hatha yoga or raja yoga.

The practitioner must know that each level of yoga is a stepping stone to discover one's inner nature. Meditation or samadhi is not the final in yoga. An integrated personality, which has the ability to experience life filled with the positive, sattvic qualities and integrated faculties, is the purpose of yoga. *Tadaa drashtuh svaroope'vasthaanam* – Then the seeker, the practitioner, the sadhaka becomes established in swaroopta, one's own true nature.

What is the swaroopta? It is that of perfection, *poornata*, fullness. Like the mantra *Om poornamada poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate poornasya poornamadaaya poornameva-vashisyate* – You take the full from the full, the full remains. You multiply the full with the full, the full remains. You divide the full by the full, full is the answer. You subtract full by full, full is the answer. Poornata of mind, indriyas, buddhi – spiritual realization represents the wholeness of the personality. Perfection, efficiency, creativity and selflessness are the various expressions of 'swaroopta'. That is the subject of yoga in brief.

Ashram

What is ashram? *Shram* means effort, a place where you come to make the effort to discover yourself. Who goes to hospital? Healthy people or sick people? Who goes to school? The educated or uneducated? Who comes to the ashram? People who are in search of spiritual experience. Just as a sick person goes to hospital for therapy and after getting well, leaves. Just as one ignorant child goes to school, is educated and leaves with skills which help him through life, in the same manner, a person goes to an ashram thirsting for a change in their lives and to experience shanti.

In your disturbed states of body and mind you can define shanti in many ways. The purpose of coming to an ashram is to work and learn how to work towards developing a peaceful attitude in life in which *nyaya* and *dharma* come together, righteousness and your duty. It is a place for shram, a place where you are inspired to work upon yourself to discover new dimensions within yourself. In ancient history the role

of ashrams was to produce people who followed the path of nyaya and dharma and who lived according to the principles of humanism, *maryada*. Different subjects were taught which were relevant to the time.

What was the character that you see in the embodiment of Sri Rama? He is called *Maryada Purushottam*: the best of men, *purushottam*, and is knowing what is appropriate and inappropriate. So knowledge of what is appropriate and inappropriate was the need of the time. *Raja dharma*, *pati dharma*, *stri dharma*, or the dharma of a king, a husband and of a wife, are all highlighted in the life of Sri Rama.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna inspires you to perform the right duty with one sutra: *Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye* – for inner purification a yogi performs karma in a selfless way, as duty, as dharma. That was the message.

Buddha gave the message of *ahimsa*, non-violence, as at that time there was a lot of *himsa*, aggression, everywhere. He said, ahimsa has to become the principle in life to stop the violence outside. What message did Shankaracharya give? Or Madhavacharya, or Ramanujacharya in different times and traditions? Whether it is Advaita Vedanta or Vishista Advaita as a philosophy or culture, it identified a lifestyle, an attitude, an awareness of how one can live a normal life in society with the awareness of the higher divinity, Brahman.

Swami Sivananda – living yoga

In this age, the requirement of humanity is *sukha*, *shanti* and *samridhi*, happiness, peace and prosperity. How to attain *sukha*, *shanti* and *samridhi*? That is the drive in which we are caught up today in this global environment which is impelling us towards *artha*, accomplishment, wealth, and *kama*, desire.

The social environment today is of *artha* and *kama*. Dharma and moksha has become your personal business, *artha* and *kama* have become your social business. There has to be a balance. In this quest for *sukha*, *shanti* and *samridhi* there has to be a clear mind. It is the birthright of every individual to have *sukha*, *shanti* and *samridhi*, the absence of

everything which is restrictive and limiting. Sukha elevates, dukha binds. Shanti elevates, ashanti confines. Samridhi makes one carefree, and absence of samridhi makes one worried. You have to move from absence to gain. That is the drive of humanity today. To do it in the right, appropriate manner, you have to develop a particular quality in life.

The president of India, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, visited the orphanage that we built in Bhuj after the earthquake on 14th February. He was telling the children of the orphanage in the ashram, Sivananda Balakashram, "You are living in the place of the person who has made my life. My association with Swami Sivananda has made me what I am today. So, just imagine what will be your destiny because you are living in his ashram. Imbibing, the samskaras and Swami Sivananda's teachings are practical for this age and modern times." Vedanta cannot fill the stomach of a hungry person. Vedanta cannot fill the social isolation that people experience in their lives, it only remains an intellectual process. Therefore, yoga has to come in as the yoga of personality, in which people have to be taught that service is the first part, the ability to love is the second part.

In the field of yoga there have been two great luminaries. One luminary or exponent of yoga was Sage Pantanjali. He talked about the ashtanga yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. That is the yoga of sadhana. After that came Swami Sivananda who said that once you have perfected the ashtanga yoga you have to live the yogic life.

These are the stages of developing or fulfilling that yogic life: you express your attainment through service, love, by giving, and by purifying yourself more and more. Just as gold is put in fire to purify itself, in the same way the inner purification needs to take place, when the negative qualities, tendencies and thoughts control our behaviour. Purification is conversion of tamoguna into sattwa guna.

Serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. This is the ashtanga yoga of Sivananda. The ashtanga yoga of Sivananda begins after the ashtanga yoga of Patanjali. His teaching is simple. Humanity is your God and service to

humanity is your worship. We belong to that tradition. In the parampara of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, the basic mantra given to us by our paramguru is: Humanity is your god and service is your worship.

Serve people in any way you find the opportunity. If they are rich, teach them yoga, to help manage their physical disease, illnesses, imbalances. If they are mentally disturbed, teach them yoga, mantra japa to pacify the agitated vrittis of the mind and to connect with the source of strength inside. If somebody is hungry, teach them how they can overcome their hunger for all times to come by giving them education in farming, agriculture and other trades. This was the principle of spiritual life that Swami Sivananda followed all his lifetime and has conveyed in his teachings.

I gave you this background of yoga and ashram to indicate that just as there is a purpose to the establishment of a school and college, a clinic and hospital, there is a definite purpose in the establishment of a yoga ashram. It is the place where people can inculcate the appropriate learning for their life, and that appropriate learning is samskara, *samyak akara*, balanced personality.

Establishing a lifestyle

In this context, whether it be yoga, or any attempt to experience the higher nature within, it becomes a lifestyle through sadhana. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali it is said about sadhana (1:14):

Sa tu deerghakaala nairantaryasatkaaraasevito drihabhumih.

It (practice) becomes firmly grounded by being continued for a long time with reverence, without interruption.

Practice is anything which you do for a long time, month after month, year after year continuously, with determination, with dedication, anything that you do regularly, without a break. And anything that you do, you must have faith in that.

Belief is necessary. You sit on a train, you do not know who the driver is, he might be a drunk, you don't know anything

about him. He might have had a big fight at home and be driving the train with great anger. You do not know. The train comes, you simply sit in it with the trust, with the hope that you will reach your destination safely. You have *shraddha*, faith. Do you know the bus driver? You have *shraddha* that he will take you home without any accidents. There are so many instances in your life when you place your entire life, unknowingly, trustingly, in the hands of another person.

When placing your life and trust knowingly, then it becomes *bhakti*. That is the meaning of *shraddha*. You must have faith. It is said in the *Ramacharitamanas* that without faith even yogis are unable to see God within themselves (Balkand, sloka 2):

*Bhavani shankarao vande, shraddha vishvas rupinau,
Yavyam viraha pashyanti, siddha svantastha ishvaram*

I bow down to Parvati and Lord Shiva who are embodiments of faith and trust. Without them, even the adept cannot perceive God, although He dwells within them all.

When you do a *sadhana*, for a long period, on a regular basis and with *shraddha bhavana*, faith, naturally it becomes a habit.

Cultivation of habits should become the *sadhana*. When a better habit is cultivated then it becomes your lifestyle as it guides your thinking, behaviour and performance. Therefore, the role of yoga ashrams in society is to provide an opportunity where you can put yourself through the process of *sadhana* to discover a more happy you inside.

Purpose of life and yoga: samadhi

I have read many books, many scriptures, many writings of many *sadhus*, *sannyasins* and *rishis*, yet I was never satisfied by the answers that I read or listened to. Slowly the realization came that the higher spiritual experience that people are looking for is only a result of somebody having attained a pious and balanced personality. Then things started to become clear.

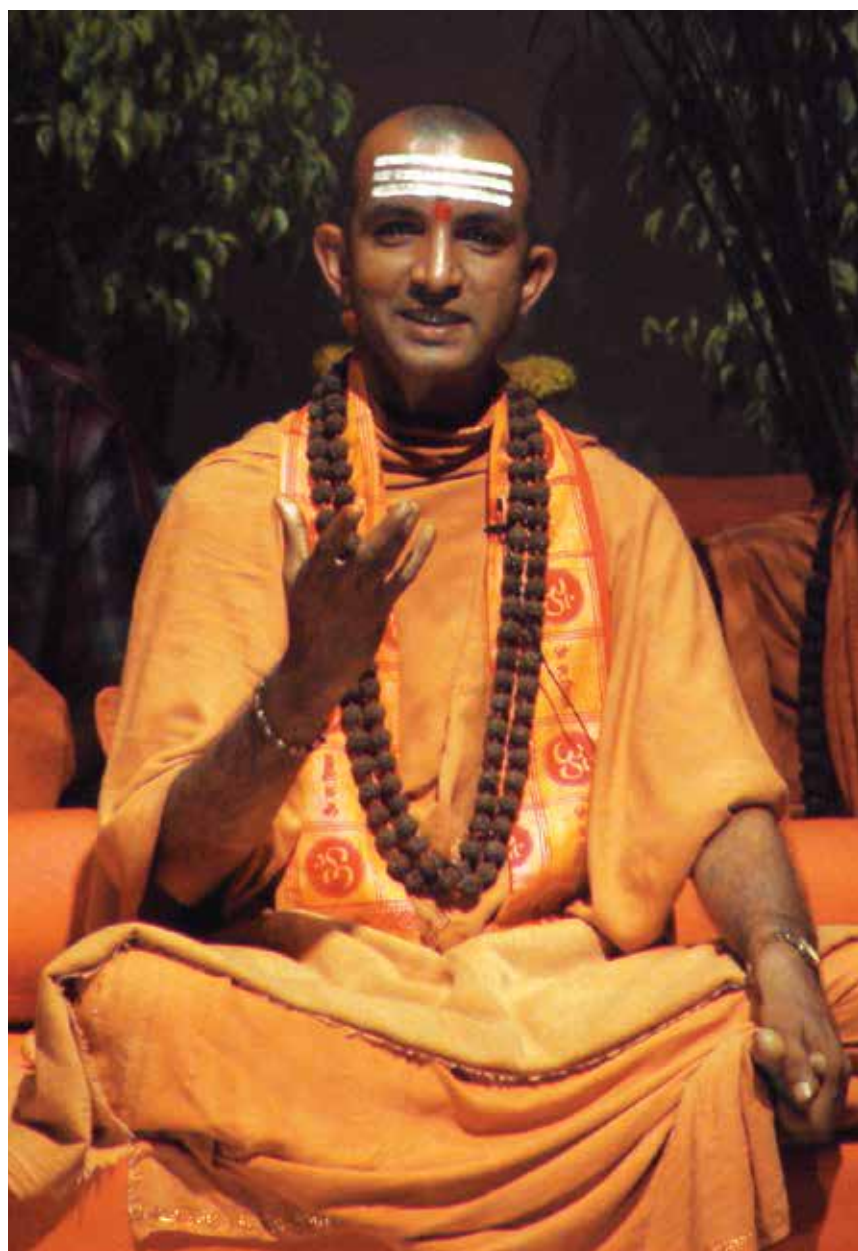
The purpose of *sadhana* is to acquire this pious and balanced personality and with this process whatever is there

in the body, mind and emotions is regulated. Therefore, the purpose of life is to acquire excellence in everything that you do, the expression of the head, heart and hands. The process that leads to this excellence is yoga. The final outcome of this excellence is knowing that, 'I am not different to that'. Knowing and identifying with that concept become the *sayujya avastha* of bhakti yoga – oneness. That is the fulfilment of human life. In between you can read whatever you want, follow whatever you want, sit in any car you want, construct as many houses as you want. You can spend lifetimes getting richer and richer:

*Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani
jatare shayanam.*

Many times we take birth, many times we die and many times we rest in the womb of our mothers.

However, ultimately you will go towards this excellence.

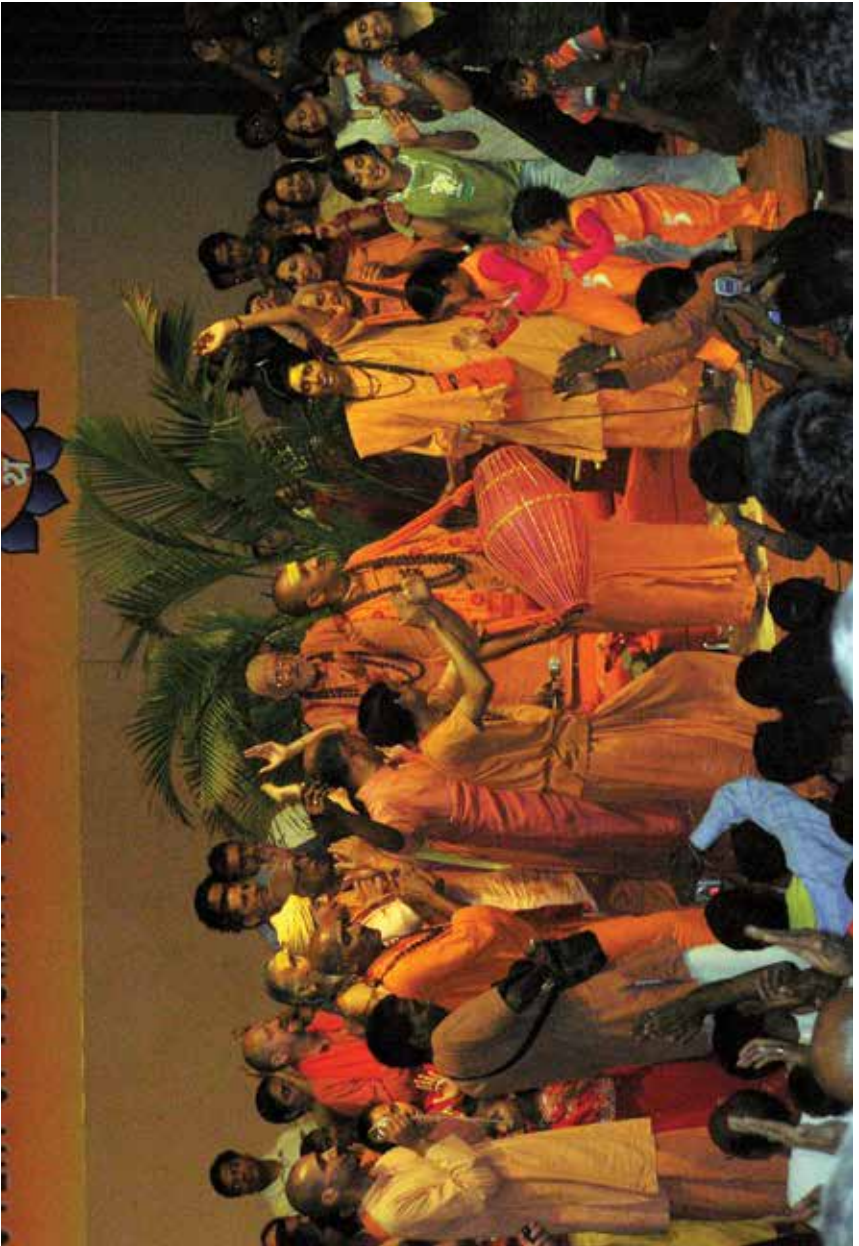
















Meeting with Children

21 February 2007, DAV School, Chennai

I am thankful to the Satyananda Yoga Centre, the administration, principal, secretary and the management of this school for giving this opportunity to spend some time with all of you in the spirit of yoga. When I think of the usefulness of yoga for children, I think about the role that yoga played in my life. I will tell you the secret I have never been to school in India, and despite that, I learnt everything that I know today only due to yoga.

When I came to the ashram of my guru, Swami Satyananda in Bihar, to live with him, I was four years old. I lived in the ashram under the guidance of my guru and he used to make me practise yoga nidra and sleep. While I was sleeping, he read books to me, scriptures, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* or any literature for that matter. Whether it was history, geography, biology or science, any subject, he read it out to me in yoga nidra. The next day he would ask me to read the book and while reading the book I used to think, 'I know all this, it is all familiar'. In the practice of yoga nidra with the help of yoga, I learnt everything I know today.

Therefore, I believe that if you are able to adopt yoga in little capsules in your life, you can improve the quality of your life. For this reason, I like working with children.

In India and outside India, we have large groups of children who are receiving and imbibing yogic samskaras. There is a saying that history and geography are such a big problem – you read them at night and forget them in the

morning. It is a saying which doesn't mean that the subject is complicated, it means that our mind is not receiving the learning that we should receive. The practices of yoga, such as asanas, pranayamas, concentration exercises, relaxation exercises, help in developing the receptivity of the mind. Once the mind becomes receptive, any learning becomes easy. The process of learning is facilitated and that is the role that yoga plays in the life of a student and young child. There are different levels of education at school, there is intellectual development, information and maturity.

According to yoga, the learning that makes the human character and personality happens until the age of eight. After the age of eight, the intellect becomes active. Intellectual learning takes place when you go to the school to learn material, science, art and commerce subjects. This process of the education helps to build the faculty, quality and potential of the intellect. You become intellectuals. Intellect is important, without intellect, without buddhi, there cannot be professionalism in life. Intellect has to come so that you can survive by developing your own professional skills and understanding in life. That is the role of schools.

Yoga says you have to combine both the external professional life for which you are educating yourself intellectually, and learning that can help build and develop your character and personality. The combination of yoga practices like asanas – tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana, surya namaskara – and pranayama, are practices which help to regulate the functions, the hormones and the secretions of the body, so that their energy can be used to develop and train the mind. Similarly, the concentration practices like yantra colouring or likhit japa on a yantra develop sharp concentration.

Concentration

The mind is like a bulb. When it is lit, the light is going in all directions, if you want to make this light into one laser beam you have to focus the light and point it in one direction. As a child I used to play with a magnifying glass. The sunlight

is there but the sunlight does not burn any leaf, any paper, nothing. However, when you fix the magnifying glass in the sunlight and you focus the rays of the sun to a point, it can burn the paper or the dry leaf on which it is falling. It can create heat on a metal plate, if you focus it on a metal plate. It shows that when light is focused and concentrated at one point, it becomes a power.

The same principle applies to the human mind. The human mind is like the light which is shining in all directions, and with the magnifying glass of concentration, you can focus the energy of the mind to make it so powerful that it can become as sharp as a laser beam. We have discovered that children experience this when they begin to practise yoga.

I come from the state of Bihar, where we have an organization for children called Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the Children's Yoga Fellowship. Today we have over 120,000 members, all children. Their age is between eight and fourteen. We teach them yoga and give enough yoga training so that one day they can become qualified yoga teachers. When they started to practise yoga at a young age, the personal discipline improved. Today we have instances when we find an eight-year old child waking up their parents in the morning to come to the ashram on time. Where in the world will you find a child waking up the parent like that? Nowhere. Many times they come to wake you up. Possibly Bihar is the only place where children wake up their parents before the alarm goes off as they want to practise their yoga.

We have seen that children who are totally involved in yoga education need to study little, for their brain becomes so sensitive and receptive like a microphone which can pick up any sound in its range. The mind becomes so highly receptive and tuned that whatever you study even once will remain with you until the end of your time. That is the intensity of intelligence that can be awakened through the practice of yoga.

When Swami Vivekananda went to Chicago, he used to go to a library and take out five or six thick books and take them to his home to read. The next day he would return the same books and take another five volumes. Then the next

day return those books and take another five. The librarian thought to himself, 'Who is this person who takes big volumes of books every day? Maybe he doesn't know English, he is not from America, he is from some far away land called India. Maybe he does not know how to read and write.'

One day out of curiosity he asked Swami Vivekananda, "What do you do with these books?" Swami Vivekananda said, "I read them." The librarian said, "Impossible, nobody can read five volumes in one day and return them the next and take another set of books. What do you mean you read them? Do you know the subject of these books?" Swami Vivekananda said, "Yes, I know." The librarian was surprised. He asked, "Can you tell me what is written in this book?" He picked up a book. Swami Vivekananda said, "You ask me." The librarian opened the book and said, "On page 93, line 7, what does it say?" Swami Vivekananda repeated the whole sentence. The librarian said, "And on page 21, what is sentence 4?" Swami Vivekananda repeated the whole sentence without looking at the book.

The librarian did many tests like this and asked many questions. Swami Vivekananda was able to answer each question for he had photographic memory. Photographic memory is when you look at something, you take a picture, like a photograph. You are reading a book, and each page is being photographed by the eyes. This is the speed of reading, memorizing and remembering. Then you close the book and if somebody asks, "What is written on page 21?" Immediately the photograph of page 21 will come in front and you will be able to repeat it as if you were reading the actual page. That is the photographic memory which Swami Vivekananda had, which my Guru had and has. All of you can develop photographic memory, this ability. For that you don't have to become a sadhu or a sannyasin.

Yoga for children

Body and mind are integrated. If you work on your body you are influencing the mind. If you work on your mind you are affecting the body. In milk, curd is hidden. You cannot see the

curd or butter in the milk. When you put the milk through a process, you are able to extract butter, or convert the liquid form of milk into curd. With the transformation, the quality, the look and the name of the milk changes. When you look at butter you cannot say this is an extract of milk, as it is a totally different substance or matter. If you look at curd, you wonder how milk became that. In the same manner, the mind of the child is like milk. If the child is given the opportunity to discipline life a little bit, then all the positive qualities of life will manifest.

The experiment of yoga in education started in 1976, when a school in France was selected to teach yoga. In that school, the students were very destructive and if ten students would pass the exams in one year, it used to become a school record. Out of a thousand children, ten would pass. There we started to teach yoga. Within one year for the first time in the history of the school, everybody passed with excellent marks. Since 1976 until today yoga is part of the school syllabus.

Many other schools in Europe have incorporated yoga education, and many books have been written, like *Yoga Education for Children*. Teachers, parents and researchers in child psychology feel that if children are given the right environment and motivation, they can become excellent in life. They can achieve anything in life. Children need to have the choice, and children become aware of the choice with the practice of yoga.

I am here with you like a child not like a sadhu or sannyasin, for it is yoga which has made my life. I am telling you of my yogic experience from the perspective of a child, not from the perspective of a grown-up sannyasin. Therefore, I wish that even when you are away from the school, at home, during vacation, continue with your yoga practice. Do not stop it, continue with it, for ultimately the winner on this journey will be you.

I want you to be winners in life. Learning yoga practices and the principles of asana will help balance the physical manifestation of prana shakti. Learning pranayama will help to develop and awaken the dormant brain potential. This

human brain is active only ten percent, ninety percent of the brain is dormant according to science. Only one-tenth of the brain is active and the remaining portions are in a state of inactivity. With this one-tenth of the brain active we are able to achieve and aspire for anything and everything in life if we decide to do so. Just imagine what will happen if all of us can have a hundred percent of the brain active.

Yoga provides an opportunity to explore these dormant centres of the brain and make you more creative, effective and efficient in life. I request everyone present to remember that yoga is a discipline of life and not only physical movement. If you are able to work with asanas, you are working also with your mind. If you are practising yoga nidra, you are relaxing the mind, the senses, nerves, muscles and the body. If you are painting a yantra or writing a mantra, you are learning how to concentrate the mind. The practice of trataka will be the technique that will eventually awaken and open the doors of intelligence. Your teachers, devoted and dedicated to teaching yoga to all of you, will ensure that you get the right training in yoga and learn how to apply yoga in the present condition and environment you are in, whether as a student, householder or a professional person. This learning of yoga is the most important learning and is a part of our tradition in this country, India.

Yoga is not Indian. We do not know where yoga came from for in those ancient civilizations which do not exist anymore, there are statues depicting traditional yogic postures, yogic asanas. In South America, we found statues of yoga asanas dating back about 7,000 years from the present. In Northern Europe, in Scandinavian countries, in Africa, in Egypt we found references to yoga dating back thousands of years. We came to the conclusion that once upon a time, yoga was a worldwide culture. Due to whatever the political, natural and social reason, the understanding, the knowledge and the practice of yoga was lost in those countries and preserved in India. Today yoga is again emerging from India to the world, however, it is a subject of human heritage. We have to adopt yoga in this manner with the understanding that it is our

heritage to protect, imbibe and live, so that we can awaken the qualities that make us true human beings. Therefore, give yoga a chance in your life and enjoy the benefits.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

What should we do to increase our memory and concentration?

There are two powerful techniques for memory and concentration. One is brahmari pranayama – plugging the ears, breathing in through the nose and then humming like a bee as you exhale. Another practice is trataka. Before the commencement of a class, before opening any book, all students should practise brahmari pranayama seven times and then open their books and do their studies. It will take one and a half minutes to two minutes to do this pranayama seven times. You will be able to retain and improve your memory and concentration.

I recommend one more practice. The breathing practices of yoga are recommended to enhance learning ability, especially equal inhalation and exhalation, with slow and deep breathing. You breathe in long and deep, and you breathe out long and deep. If you can work on your breathing and increase the breath capacity, at the time of inhalation and at the time of exhalation, your concentration will improve tremendously.

What should be done to acquire self-confidence and destroy over-confidence?

I will tell you a story about Mulla Nasruddin. Once upon a time many hundreds of years ago, there used to be this Mulla, a Sufi who was a great master. While he was travelling one day, he came across a fair. In those days the fair sites were places of entertainment, where one would go and do some archery and by hitting the bull's eye one would win a prize.

During this fair there was an archery contest. The disciples of Mulla Nasruddin entered the name of Mulla for the contest. He did not know about it, so when his name was announced,

he was surprised. Nevertheless, he decided to go and he was given one bow and three arrows, and was shown the bull's eye in the distance.

The first time he is over-confident. He puts out his chest, picks up the bow, takes one arrow, fixes it up, doesn't look left or right, and shoots it. The arrow goes way beyond the mark. Everyone starts to laugh that such a great guru doesn't know how to shoot the arrow. Mulla hears everybody laughing and he becomes a bit nervous. He picks up the bow again and the second arrow, and this time with careful attention, he shoots the arrow. The strength is not there, and the arrow goes only halfway and then falls down. Again everybody is laughing, "How come such a great person can't even shoot an arrow?" Then Mulla picks up the bow again and the third arrow, and shoots. This time the arrow goes straight to the bull's eye and everyone is clapping. Mulla collects his prize and begins to walk away.

His disciples thought, 'Mulla had three arrows to shoot. He shot one which went wide off the mark, the second went half-way and fell down, he shot the third with the right force and hit the bull's eye. There must be some learning in this.' So they asked Mulla, "Before you go, can you please tell us who was shooting the arrow?" Mulla said, "The first arrow was shot by a person who is over-confident, and in over-confidence he forgets the rules that govern life. Whenever one is over-confident, one will miss the target in life. Over-confident people believe they can do everything without actually knowing their full potential. Therefore, the over-confident person will always miss the mark."

"Then who was the second person who shot the arrow?"

Mulla said, "The second person is the under-confident person who is not sure about himself, always doubting himself, who is too self-conscious, thinking, 'Am I doing this right? Will other people be happy? I hope I haven't done anything wrong or bad'. This person will never have the courage, strength or conviction to achieve what he desires in life. Then the disciples asked again, "Who was the third person who shot the arrow?"

Mulla said, "That was me."

This means that if you want to develop success in life, you have to be the natural you. Not over-confident, not under-confident, just be yourself and when you are yourself, then at your own speed, your own pace, you will win the race like the turtle won the race with the hare.

How can we control our aggressive behaviour, like anger at fellow classmates or siblings, over-enthusiasm or anxiety for any work given?

There is one asana which helps known as shashankasana. If you get angry quickly at your fellow classmates or siblings and you have aggressive behaviour, then this is the asana that you need to do.

We have always seen you smiling and laughing. Don't you ever get angry? If no, then tell us the trick of how not to get angry and keep smiling like you.

By doing this asana, you can control anger. If for five minutes in the morning you do this asana and stay down comfortably, then you will find that in one week or fifteen days your anger will disappear. This asana controls the production of a hormone from the adrenal glands known as adrenaline. When somebody is angry, it is this hormone that is mixed in the blood and then the brain gets hot, the body begins to shake and shiver, anger comes with full force. To regulate adrenaline and overcome the negative effects of anger, this asana is important.

Can something be done to have sound sleep at night without bad dreams?

When you go to sleep at night count your breath back from 50 to 1. Breathing in and breathing out 50, breathing in and breathing out 49, breathing in and breathing out 48, breathing in and breathing out 47, like this you come back to 1. If you find that when you reach 30, 35, 36 you forget the count, again start from 50. The moment you can come from 50 back to number 1 while counting backwards, you will have such nice, deep and refreshing sleep that dreams will not bother you.

Whenever you have nightmares or bad dreams, you should always practise counting the breath back from 50 to 1.

How can a person who is sluggish and non-enthusiastic be made to be more active and enthusiastic?

If the student is asking this, I would say by changing your own motivations. In yoga we use a *sankalpa*, a resolve. You should repeat the sankalpa every morning on waking up, and every night before going to sleep. This sankalpa will act on the subconscious mind. The power of the subconscious mind needs no description, for the power of the subconscious mind is to convert thought or desire into an actual process. Through the use of sankalpa you can help a person overcome the non-enthusiastic, sluggish and lethargic nature which hold a person back.

Why did you want to become a sannyasin? What was the name of the ashram you stayed in? What was your mother tongue?

I became a sannyasin as I thought I would not have to study if I became one. The ashram to which I came is known as Sivananda Ashram. We belong to the Sivananda tradition. Swami Sivananda was born in Pattumadai, in Tamil Nadu. My parampara begins from Tamil Nadu. Swami Sivananda is my grandfather. He was born in the year 1887 and he left his body in 1963. He was a medical doctor and he became a sannyasin. He took upon himself to inspire his disciples by telling them to serve society.

My guru is Swami Satyananda. Although he was born in the Himalayas, our guru tongue is Tamil. The guru tongue is Tamil, Mother tongue is Hindi and business tongue is English. These are the three languages that we have. My parents are also sannyasins, who were disciples of Swami Sivananda and later joined Swami Satyananda.

What is pranayama?

Pranayama is an important subject, as it is from pranayama that the practice of yoga begins. Up to the asanas, you are

experimenting with the body. From pranayama onwards you begin to experiment, awaken and move the *prana shakti*, which is a subtle, vital and mental force. The manipulation and awakening of this prana shakti leads to the higher subtle dimensions in which we exist. Therefore, yoga begins with pranayama. Up to asanas is preparation of the body, senses, brain, internal organs and systems, and then pranayama launches you on the path of yoga.

It is the same prana, which has to be moved in different locations of the body to awaken different psychic and dormant centres of the body, so that you can realize the full potential of the human brain and mind. For this the practices of mudras and bandhas have been described in the path of yoga. There are many different kinds of mudras. In dance, you see expression of various mudras which indicate an attitude and emotion. They evoke a response from the feelings. When a feeling is activated, the *shakti*, the power of the feeling, as prana is also activated. With the practice of mudras this prana is directed towards the harmony of the mind. With the practice of bandhas, the same prana is further stimulated in the vital centres responsible for the evolution of human consciousness.

One Plug, Two Sockets

21 February 2007, Chinmaya Mission, Chennai

Whenever I have come from the north part of India to the south, I have felt that I was going to a *tirtha*, a place of pilgrimage, as our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, comes from Pattamadai. In the past, major yogis and siddhas have made south India their abode. So I have not come to introduce yoga to you, I have come to share a few thoughts about yoga with you.

Swami Sivananda

Our tradition begins with Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati. In his professional life he was a medical doctor, one of the few FRCS doctors in the early twentieth century. He had a lucrative practice in Malaysia, yet due to an inner spiritual call he left his thriving practice and went straight to the Himalayas. There he was transformed from Kuppuswami to Swami Sivananda. He became a visionary who was conscious of the sufferings of people and wanted to help them overcome the miseries in life, although as sannyasins of the Adi Shankara tradition of the Dashnami sannyasa parampara, our main learning is in Advaita Vedanta.

Swami Sivanandaji told his disciples, “As sannyasins of the highest paramahansa order, live the principles of Vedanta in your personal life, however, help people come out of their misery, not with a philosophy but with a practical subject. That practical subject is yoga. Vedanta will not help anyone manage or overcome physical, psychological, mental, emotional or

spiritual suffering. People need and are looking for a way by which they can overcome these many dimensions of suffering and find an expression of creativity in life. To this end, use the practices of yoga to help people.”

He spoke of an integrated approach to yoga; not only hatha yoga, but raja yoga, jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, a combination of yogas, as a human personality is a multidimensional personality. The human personality is not just the physical body; in it there is the mind, feelings, sentiments and emotions, the psychic potential and the system of energy. The entire life and body is governed by the faculty called consciousness. A human being lives in many dimensions at the same time. One experiences many dimensions of existence in twenty-four hours.

The awakening and expression of a balanced personality must take place. People may have many aspirations in life. Some people seek peace, others God-realization, powers and siddhis, sharp intellectual knowledge and understanding, and some people seek only the relief from their sufferings. For each need, for each person, there is a system of yoga to help them.

Swami Sivananda further stated that in human life, the three qualities of intellect, emotion and action manifest: the qualities of head, heart and hands. These faculties have to be balanced, integrated and awakened so that the creativity inherent in these faculties manifests. The expression of these potentials must happen in behaviour, performance and actions through the hands.

In this manner, he gave a practical understanding of the yogic process. He said people may want God-realization, *moksha*, or they may feel the urge to experience higher meditative states, *samadhi*, but that is not the need of the individual; it is only an ambition. The need of the individual is to become capable, and once you become capable in body, mind, emotions and spirit you can attain everything that you desire in life; you can increase the efficiency and creativity of life.

Your need is to use the potential that has been given to you by God when you were born in the form of the potentials of *buddhi* or intellect, *bhavana* or emotions, and *karma* or

performance. With the awakening of these potentials in life you become a more effective, efficient human being. The peace that you are looking for is the outcome of becoming better in life. God-realization that you are seeking is an outcome of living a balanced and harmonious life. The contentment and fulfilment that you are seeking within yourself is the outcome of knowing and separating the apparent from the real. The journey that takes you through this process and transforms your personality from a restrictive, confined nature to an outgoing, expansive nature is the process of yoga.

Yoga and viyoga

Yoga means union. Before yoga can take place in life *viyoga*, separation, has to happen. Understanding where *viyoga* happens is the main secret to perfect yoga. Yoga means union, *viyoga* means disunion. *Viyoga*, the process of separation, is important and relevant in life, for *viyoga* means to separate oneself from the point of attachment.

What are you attached to? Your mind is attached to different sense objects, which attract and hypnotize the mind, and which infuse the idea of comfort in the mind with the attainment of that object. The mind has to be separated from this. The attachment to objects can lead to confusion.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna (2:62–63):

*Dhyaayato vishayaanpumsah sangasteshoopajaayate;
Sangaatsanjaayate kaamah kaamaatkrodho'bhijaayate.*

*Krodhaadbhavati sammohah sammohaatsmritivibhramah;
Smritimbhramshaad buddhinaasho
buddhinaashaatpranashyati.*

When a man thinks of the objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises.

From anger comes delusion; from delusion the loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes.

A simple statement of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Yet a profound statement that indicates how an association of an individual's mind and nature takes place with sense objects.

The proximity to a sense object will create a desire to acquire that object – *Sangaatsanjaayate kaamah kaamaat-krodho'bhijaayate* – when the desire becomes powerful then the aggressive quality manifests. That aggressive quality comes forth to acquire that object of desire. You strive to acquire it. That object revolves around in the mind even when you are not doing anything. The idea comes, 'I am going to acquire that one day or the other and I am working for it'. The aggressive quality manifests. When by some fluke or chance you are unable to acquire it, then that aggressive quality becomes anger, frustration, anxiety, dejection, depression. *Krodhaat bhavati sammoha* – from this aggressive nature comes dejection, depression, frustration due to unfulfilled desires, the mind is deluded. In the deluded mind you lose the understanding and wisdom of what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. The loss of wisdom or discrimination between the appropriate and inappropriate is referred to in *smritimbhramshaad buddhinaasho*. You lose the memory of the appropriate and the inappropriate, the *buddhi*, the intellect, is destroyed. *Buddhinaashaatpranashyati* – when the understanding, the wisdom is killed in the life of an individual, it is the same as dying.

The proximity to a sense object gives birth to a craving, a desire. One has to detach oneself from this desire to separate and free the mind from the clutches of the sense objects. This is where *viyoga* has to happen from *samsara*, the world, before you become established in *yoga*.

I can explain this in another way: there is a plug and two sockets in the wall. The electricity is flowing in both sockets and you are plugged to one socket in the wall. How many pins does a plug have? Three. How many pins does your life have? Three – *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, positive, negative and neutral. One socket represents *samsara*, the world of sense objects, the senses and a limited expression of nature. The other socket is empty, right next to it. That socket is the socket of spirituality.

The extraction from the first socket where you are connected with the world is the process of *viyoga*, separating. Fixing the plug in the other socket next to it, and ensuring that the connection is proper, is the process of *yoga*, coming together.

There is the gross, external, material life of an individual and on the other side is the spiritual life. It is the same current which is flowing in both sockets; the difference is that one represents the outer, the other represents the inner dimension. This is how you need to understand the process of *yoga*.

The four tyres of life

Your association is with the world, the environment, your family, society and people. The communal mind of society is directing itself towards the attainment of comfort and pleasure in life, towards *artha* and *kama*. The spiritual mind goes towards *dharma* and *moksha*. Imagine these to be the four wheels of the car: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha*. When you have to undertake a journey from one city to the next, you have to ensure that the four wheels are equally pressurised with air. When you travel and there is a puncture, what do you do? You immediately stop the car, change the tyre, repair the damaged one, and until the damaged one is repaired you do not continue your journey. Whatever you do, you ensure that all your four tyres are intact and there is one spare in the back. If the spare one in the back has no air then you will be worrying continuously about what would happen if you have a flat tyre, and not be able to change it. You are keenly aware of the state of your tyres when you make a journey; why are you so ignorant on the journey of life?

On the journey of life, you have two punctured tyres, *dharma* and *moksha*. You are dragging your car with only two wheels, *artha* and *kama*, yet saying, “The car doesn’t move very fast.” *Sannyasins*, renunciates have the two tyres of *dharma* and *moksha*, yet have flat tyres of *artha* and *kama*. They also drag their car and wonder what is happening despite all their effort, why sometimes the seed of desire raises its head. This is due to the separation of the basic

principles of spiritual life from material life. That is where the mistake has been made, for it was said: for people engrossed in society, artha and kama should become the path, and for people engrossed in the discovery of the self, dharma and moksha has to become the path. However, all these four have to go hand in hand. Twenty-five percent of attention has to be given to artha, twenty-five percent attention to kama, the fulfilment of desire, twenty-five percent to the fulfilment of dharma, and twenty-five percent attention has to be given to the attainment of moksha.

If you can give undivided twenty-five percent attention to all four you will be a good human being. If you give undivided attention to only two and ignore the other two there will always be imbalance. The process of viyoga, the extraction, will never be complete.

From tamas to sattwa

When you are involved with the world and the sense objects and you have no idea of your inner life or spiritual life, then at that time the mind becomes tamasic, subject to the influences of the world. The influences of the world are not positive. They are also guided by the tamasic force. Tamas is not a negative thing. It represents a state of existence where the consciousness is bound to a form, a quality, to a *swaroopa*.

According to Samkhya philosophy, sattwa guna represents the nature of illumination, luminosity, *prakash sheelatva*. Rajoguna represents *kriya*, the nature of dynamic force, motion, continuity, evolution, the ongoing process. Tamoguna is *stithi sheelatva*, the nature of having adopted a form. Earth is earth, soil is soil and mud is mud, yet when you mix earth with water and knead it, you are preparing to convert that raw material into an earthen pot. Mud without form, without any shape, in its original form, is the sattwa nature, where the inherent potential lies dormant. Mixing the mud with water with the idea to make it into a pot becomes rajoguna, where a transformation or change takes place in the original state of the matter. When you make the earthen pot and the earth has taken a shape that is tamoguna – the potential has taken

a form, name and quality and has a specific use, *nama*, *roopa* and *guna*. In the tamoguna state, in the formed state, there are limitations.

In tamoguna, sattwa has been confined to express or experience the outer in a specific manner; it is conditioned. It is the conditioning which is recognized as tamoguna. The world is conditioned. Your family conditions you, your culture, religion and environment conditions you. You live in a world of conditionings. Your responses are also conditioned responses. They are not coming out of human wisdom; they are responses that have been pre-engraved in your mind and consciousness.

It is the conversion, once again, of the conditioned state of existence into an unconditional existence that is needed. This transformation represents viyoga and yoga – viyoga from the conditioned and yoga with the spiritual. If you can understand the concept of viyoga and yoga, the entire process becomes easy. In the raja yoga of Patanjali, eight stages of yoga have been described: yamas, niyamas, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. What is the purpose of these practices? The purpose of yama and niyama is to alter a mental conditioning, to bring about a change in the mental behaviour patterns. Ahimsa, satya, asteya, aparigraha, brahmacharya are the five yamas. Shaucha, santosha, tapa, swadhyana, ishwara pranidhana are the five niyamas. Are they the moral code of conduct? Are they ethics that we need to imbibe in our life? No, they are neither moral codes of conduct nor ethics. They are conditionings of mind which have to be adopted to overcome the limiting conditionings which exist.

Violence is an integrated part of human personality. Nobody teaches you how to be violent, yet you are violent. Does any school teach you how to get angry, how to hate, how to become jealous? Where do you learn it from? It is an expression of human nature. Yet people ask, 'How can I become a bhakta? How can I become more loving and compassionate?' Why don't they ask, 'How can I learn how to be angry and jealous?' Nobody asks. You don't have to learn how to express the negative qualities of life; you do that naturally, spontaneously. This indicates that your personality

is pre-conditioned by the limitations set by the nature, the body and mind. That is tamas.

When tamas is predominant in life, anger, aggression, frustration and dejection are predominant. How do you transform or convert that into a positive force? By adopting a yama or a niyama, which balances the negative expression. If aggression is the main force in your life, practise ahimsa to balance the aggressive nature. Ahimsa does not mean stopping killing and violence. Ahimsa means absence of the aggressive quality from your personality permanently. Ahimsa is the absence of violence from your personality, nature, mind, behaviour and attitude.

Satya is adopting the truthful attitude in life and getting away from the falsities of life. Each yama and niyama helps to fine-tune and fine-adjust the negative principle which is predominant in your life at present.

Asana and pranayama

Then you start with the practice of asana and pranayama to change the behaviour or habits of the physical body. Your body is the most misunderstood object in the world.

The shastras once upon a time said, 'It is only through God's grace that one receives the human body'. I have made another shastra, 'To acquire a healthy body is a gift of God'. When it was difficult to acquire a human body the statement was, 'Only through God's grace one acquires the human body to evolve'. Today when it is simple to acquire a human body, and overpopulation is a symptom of that, the statement has changed.

It is very easy to acquire a human body. It is rare to find a healthy body and easy to find a sick body right from the day of birth.

This indicates that to acquire absolute and optimum physical wellbeing in which the body is in a state of perfect expression of its energies, without decay, disease or death. One can transcend these limitations of the body. One can eradicate the disturbances in the body through the practice of asana and pranayama.

The word 'disease' is composed of two different words: ease, comfort. When you put the prefix 'dis' it means disturbed. Disturbed ease of the body. When the state of comfort of the body has changed illnesses come, diseases are experienced. The meaning of disease is actually contained in the word itself, whether it be asthma, diabetes, blood pressure, hypertension or any other problem.

High blood pressure is an imbalance in the circulatory system due to stress and anxiety. When stress levels go up the normal balance of the body is lost. When the stress becomes too much and the body is unable to deal with it, then stress becomes a disease. Hypertension, high blood pressure is a good example of mismanagement of stress in life. Mismanagement of stress becomes a disease, hypertension.

Management of stress and mind, and suppression of the faculties of mind becomes respiratory disorders. When there is suppression right from early childhood, the child in the course of time will develop respiratory problems like bronchitis, asthma. Suppression of mind and accumulation of stress leads to asthma. Mismanagement of habit leads to diabetes. When you become too greedy the result is diabetes. Every illness, every disease, if you analyze it carefully only happens because of mismanagement in lifestyle. There is no reason for somebody to become sick if their lifestyle is appropriate.

In the quest to be comfortable in life your lifestyle is sedentary. People think that status is more important in life than health. Status is not important in life; health is important in life. Here is an example of status: you wake up in the morning and everything comes to bed: the morning coffee, the newspaper, the remote control of the TV.

You are mad after comfort in life and the idea that comfort in life is less activity is wrong. You sit in bed the whole day, you sit on a chair the whole day, you sit in your car the whole day. When do you go for a walk? When do you go to the gym? When do you go to a yoga class? Your priority is to minimize your physical involvement with everything and anything. You feel that the less you move, the more you have gone up in status. The more you move, the more you feel you are doing

menial work. It is a wrong attitude to have in life. Due to this sedentary lifestyle you expose yourself to physical and psychological conflicts, imbalances and diseases.

When you practise asanas and pranayamas you are re-aligning the internal organs and systems of the body to function in a more harmonious and balanced manner. When you are able to practise yoga properly and the body begins to respond to the yoga techniques that you perform, you will suddenly discover that many of the problems you were having go away, as the body tunes itself according to its nature.

People think that yoga has worked wonders, in reality this is not so. When you are sick, you try every kind of -pathy like allopathy, homeopathy, naturopathy, ayurpathy, waterpathy. By the time you have tried all the different pathies, your disease, your illness has increased and taken bigger hold and deeper roots in your body and mind. When you come to yoga you begin to move your body; as you practise pawanmuktasana, trikonasana, surya namaskara, the body organs begin to move and the imbalances disappear. You think, yoga is wonderful, without realizing that yoga has done nothing except make you move your body in a controlled, regulated and disciplined manner. That is the effect of asanas. When you move the body in a regulated, disciplined manner, then in that state you experience comfort and stillness. That is what Patanjali has defined as *yogasana – sthiram sukham asanam*.

Asanas and pranayamas prepare you mentally for the nervous agitations and muscular stresses of the body. Hormonal imbalances of the body affect the brain and mental behaviour pattern as well. One drop of adrenaline in your system can excite you, one drop of melatonin in your system can put you to sleep – this is the effect of hormones on the body, brain and mind.

It is the realignment of these internal organs, systems and hormones that happens with yoga and you experience physical wellbeing and health. The negative conditioning of the body is changed into positive strength. The illness that you were suffering from has given way and you discover greater strength within yourself. Illness is an opportunity to discover

strength within yourself. Illness is not a debilitating factor; it is a God-given opportunity to discover how you can modify yourself, improve and become better. It is not suffering. You can change your perspective: you made a mistake which you should not have done, therefore, you are sick now. You have to rectify that mistake and ensure that you do not commit the same mistake again in the future. If you smoke and develop respiratory problems, then you have to learn from that. Don't try to improve the condition of your lungs and keep smoking. That defeats the whole purpose of modifying your lifestyle. It defeats the whole purpose of finding the strength and peace within yourself.

Transformation

Then you move into the practices of pratyahara and dharana. All the inner conditionings and samskaras, which make your personality and are responsible for your mentality, thinking, perceptions and attitudes in life are transformed. That is the purpose of pratyahara and dharana. The change of human conditioning represents the transformation of the tamasic quality into a sattwic force. The moment you become established in sattwa you begin to live and experience higher yoga, which begins with the practice of *jnana*, wisdom, and continues for it does not end or culminate with samadhi.

The different forms of yoga such as hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga improve the quality of your life today. These five yogas are devoted and dedicated to creating a positive transformation. The process of raja yoga consists of: yama and niyama to change the mental response to a situation; asana and pranayama to realign the circuits of the body, mind and brain; pratyahara and dharana to change the limiting conditionings of life into a positive sattwic force and strength.

Hatha does not mean force. The word *hatha* is combination of two mantras, *Ham* and *Tham*. The mantra *Ham* represents vital force, vital energy, the solar energy, *prana shakti*. The mantra *Tham* is the mantra of the lunar energy or *chitta shakti*. These are the two forces governing life. Prana shakti governs

the *annamaya kosha*, the body of matter; and chitta shakti governs the *manomaya kosha*, the body of the mind. Matter and mind are the two expressions of energy in life. The word hatha indicates harmony between the solar and lunar force, the prana shakti and the chitta shakti. This prana shakti and chitta shakti are harmonized by taking oneself through different stages of purification and concentration. Therefore, you will find that in hatha yoga three shatkriyas, neti, dhauti, basti, are of purification. Nauli, kapalbhati and trataka are for concentration and awakening of prana shakti. This is the subject of hatha yoga, along with asana and pranayama.

Just as raja yoga is a system of mind management, bhakti yoga is a system of emotion management. It is the yoga of emotional management. A crystal has no colour. That colour will be reflected inside on which the crystal is placed. If you place a clear crystal on a red cloth, you will see the reflection of the red inside the clear crystal. If you place it on a blue cloth, you will see the blue reflection inside. You will always see the colours being reflected inside the crystal. The crystal by itself does not have any colour.

Emotions do not have any colour. Emotions are not raga and dwesha, emotions are not love and compassion, hatred or jealousy, friendship or animosity. These experiences and expressions of emotions are due to the association of emotion with a sense object. When you see a person who is suffering, the emotion that comes up is compassion. When you see your child, the emotion that comes up is affection. When you see a bag of gold the emotion that will come will be greed. When you see your adversary, your competitor, the emotion that will come up is jealousy. When you see your lover, the emotion that will come is of love.

The first form of bhakti as defined by Sri Rama in the *Ramacharitamana*s, is satsang. The meaning of *satsang* is association with truth – *sat sangha*. Association with truth means that you remove from your nature and personality the masks that you wear, and become a truthful observer of yourself. You put masks and colours on your face. You like to project yourself to other people: ‘Look, I am like this’. When

you project yourself in a particular manner, you are putting on a particular mask. As a good saintly person, you have put on a good saintly mask. As a demonical person you have put on a demonical mask. As a suffering person, you have put on a suffering mask. As a happy person you have put on a happy mask. Can you be free from these masks in your life? If you can, then that is satsang, not listening to a discourse, not going to poojas and worships, they are not satsangs. They are only lectures and discourses, nothing more than that, *pravachan*.

The attainment of satsang is difficult. People say bhakti is easy, yet it is the most difficult of yogas. If you analyze bhakti in its true sense as a system of managing your own emotions and nature, then bhakti has to lead you through a transformation which you have never imagined could happen in your life. Therefore, in yoga, there is a sequence.

First, perfect hatha yoga, purify the body, awaken the shakti. Then you perfect raja yoga, learn how to manage your mind. Then you perfect karma yoga, learn how you can live selflessly in this life. While you are perfecting karma yoga, jnana yoga will also be perfected with the expansion of consciousness and perceptions of the reality that surround you. The last yoga to be practised and perfected is bhakti yoga, because then the journey is made, from the non-transcendental to the transcendental experience of life, from the suffering experience of life to experiencing the wellness, wholeness, the completeness of life.

Yoga has to be seen in its complete form, not only as a practice which you do for half an hour or one hour whenever you wish, and ignore when you do not wish to do it. You eat every day because you think food is necessary to survive, for strength, for life. You sleep every day because you think it is necessary to maintain the sanity of mind. There are certain things you don't ignore in life, however, there are many things relevant for the development and upliftment of life which you do ignore. Yoga is one of them, yet if you sincerely commit yourself to the process of yoga, then the hidden and dormant faculties come to the surface of existence and you begin to express them.

Beginning of Yoga

22 February 2007, Chennai

Yoga is the link that connects all the traditions of this country, just like the thread connects all the beads in a mala. Yoga is the universal sadhana adopted by every tradition in India, whether in the form of mantra, meditation, posture, respiration or any other form. Even the systems of upasanas that are used by many sampradayas follow the principles and theories of yoga.

Yoga is the thread connecting the theories, philosophies and aspirations of the people of this country. It gives a reason to go deep into the traditions they follow to experience inner transformation; their system can bring this about. An inner transformation does take place when you realize yoga in its true form. It is for this reason that yoga has been accepted the world over by people of different cultures, civilizations, mentalities and religions.

I had the opportunity to live in Christian cloisters, where no man had ever gone before in history, to live with the nuns of the Christian tradition to teach them yoga. With a mandated order of the Vatican I also taught priests and monks. I used to question the nuns and the priests, “There are many people who believe yoga to be different from your own tradition but what is your feeling?” They said that it is only through the practice of yoga that they are able to understand the theories, precepts, prayers and techniques of contemplation which they follow in their tradition.

In the last five years there has been a keen interest in yoga by the people of Islamic countries. We used to have an ashram

in Baghdad. There are many yoga centres in Iran and they are the only group in Iran who are authorized to publish and distribute literature in yoga throughout the Islamic world. I tell the dharmacharyas that yoga has come into a country where you, your philosophy and religion can never enter. It is a moment of pride and success for yoga that it is accepted by people of all denominations as a practice and a subject which can help them understand their own lifestyles in a better way.

Recently there has been a great interest in yoga in India. In our country at different times different people have presented the subject of yoga, and today with the help of the media, yoga has become a household word. Everyone is observing something of yoga at least once in twenty-four hours, either reading about it, seeing a program or hearing about it, whether in a passing reference or whether involved in some practice. Still the society has not yet understood the right application of yoga. For society, yoga is the performance of postures, or breathing in a funny manner. This is the notion we have to correct, for yoga is part and parcel of our culture and life. Therefore, do not treat yoga as a subject of the body only.

Viyoga is the principle with which yoga begins. Sometimes people think of the word viyoga as ‘renouncing, rejecting, separating’, and they worry. They associate the word viyoga with suffering. Viyoga is not suffering but the absence of the integrated and harmonious nature known as yoga. It is only the absence of that. If *yoga* means union, then *viyoga* means separation.

Instruction on viyoga has been given by many people throughout the ages. The message of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* is on viyoga, detachment and *anasakti*, non-attachment. *Anasakti* is what we have to aspire for and many hints have been given by Sri Krishna about *anasakti*, such as: *Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye* – That a yogi performs the actions renouncing the identification with the result, for inner purification, *atmashuddhi*.

What is the meaning of inner purification? You are working continuously with expectation, motivation, desire and

inspiration. You are continuously working with your eyes on the outcome and result of your performance. You go to the office knowing fully well that at the end of the month you will receive your pay cheque. Nobody goes with a selfless attitude. There is an expectation behind everything that you do in life. It is not wrong to have expectation, yet the identification with that expectation is what has to be reduced in the course of time through sadhana.

What is bad is the association of the ego with your expectation, as the outcome is going to affect your ego performance, your ego status. If you are successful you are elated, if you are a failure you are deflated. If action becomes responsible for the fluctuations of your mind and these fluctuations become responsible for the confusion and suffering that arise, then that will limit and restrict the flow of human wisdom and creativity. Therefore, expectation has to be contained. When you contain your expectation, then the process of self-purification begins as you begin to limit your expectations to something realistic and practical in life. That is known as *vairagya*, the absence of *raga*. One word is *raga*, the other word is *vairagya*. *Raga* means to be involved with, and *vairagya* means not to be involved with, the absence of personal involvement. It is the most difficult thing yet this is the *anasakti* that Sri Krishna says you should develop and cultivate in life. Extract the plug from the socket of *samsara*. That is the *anasakta bhavana*, and put your plug in the socket of spirituality, that is the *yoga bhavana*. This is the process you have to go through.

Prana shakti

Last year I met a scientist from NASA, working with astronauts, their health and wellbeing when they are in space. I asked him, "How do you manage the illnesses and diseases in space?" When astronauts are living in space stations for six months, do they carry in anticipation suitcases full of medicine with them? What happens if they fall sick? He said, "Swamiji, we are working on a new system of therapy called quantum therapy, which we are successfully using with the astronauts."

I asked, “What is that quantum therapy?” He told me, it is a computer with special software and all the physical parameters like BP, heartbeat, pulse, temperature, respiration; all the physical parameters are fed into it. The computer assigns a particular frequency to the person which is captured by the computer. No matter where the person is, the computer will capture the frequency emitted by the person. Then the computer can treat the person.

If the scientist knows that the person is going to have a headache, he can feed in the information to the computer which will be beamed from the earth to that person. That beam will alter the function of his body in space and he will not have a headache. He said that in this manner they can treat many other illnesses. They can anticipate by looking at these parameters and through regular testing, that there is a possibility of a particular disease manifesting in future and treat it. He further said that hopefully by 2050, everybody will be carrying their own personal computer, monitoring their health and treating themselves. There will not be any medicine. There be no need of doctors, except for major intervention. If you feel that a headache is coming along, just run the program for headache and the headache will go away. If you feel low energy, you zap yourself with more energy and you will be fine.

I said to him, “Do you know what you are talking about? All the notions of conventional therapy will be destroyed. What you are describing is the yogic principle of working with the *pranamaya kosha*.”

What is *prana*? You find protein in different in pulses, eggs and meat, soybean and nuts. In some it is more, in some it is less. Protein is in practically everything. In the same manner, *prana* is energy, vital force, and this *prana* is contained in everything. It is there in the air that you breathe. Air is a major supply source of *prana*. This *prana* manifests itself in different forms in our body. Sometimes as heat or sometimes as stamina, the so-called second wind. When sportspeople are running and reaching the end of their effort, then for the last sprint they get a second breath, forget that they are

tired and make a dash for the finish line. Prana manifests as heat in the body, as oxygen in the blood. There are different manifestations of prana: the electrical activity in the brain, the beta, alpha, delta and theta waves are manifestations of prana shakti.

Prana shakti is everywhere. In the body it is subdivided and each has been assigned an area where it governs and controls the functions of different organs. There are five pranas: *prana*, the upward moving force, *apana*, the downward moving force, *samana*, lateral force, *udana*, the circular force, and *vyana*, the all-pervasive force. According to yoga, any kind of deficiency in the five pranas will lead to illness and disease. Therefore, yogis are concerned with the subject of activating their prana.

Yoga begins with pranayama

Yoga begins with the practice of pranayama; prior to that it is preparatory yoga. Asanas represent preparatory yoga, not higher yoga. Yama and niyama represent preparatory yoga, with long-term consequences, nevertheless they are preparatory yoga. The practice of yoga begins when you come to the series of pranayamas, for through breath you develop an awareness of the subtle force within your body. This breath is connected with the physical body as well. Breath exerts a lot of influence on the function and performance of the internal organs of the body.

When you breathe in, the heart slows down and when you breathe out the heart speeds up. There is continuous slowing and speeding of the heart with every inhalation and exhalation. If you breathe in slow, deep and long, you are giving rest to your heart. You are allowing the oxygen to mix with the blood flow and allowing sufficient time for the system to eject wastes through the breath, blood and out of the body. This is one function of the breath, to ensure the health of the heart. Many doctors in Europe and America claim that it is possible to manage difficult heart conditions through the practices of respiration. Many books have been written on the influence of breathing on the human heart.

Similarly, regulated breathing helps to balance the endocrinal gland system. It regulates the production and output of the hormones from the body and brings about a balance in the sensory and motor nervous system, so that you have physically more stamina, vitality and motivation and less lethargy in life. Respiration also controls the fluctuating moods which are subtle behaviours of the mind.

When you breathe in and out in a regulated manner, the neuronic memory of the brain influences the projection of moods. When you breathe in and out in a systematic and coordinated manner with the breath being slow and deep, the neurons in the brain fire more rhythmically and electrical interactions between different brain centres are more regulated. This is seen in longer alpha waves and a reduction in beta waves, the electrical emanations from the brain. As the body becomes more sensitive to the flow of breath, it begins to absorb prana shakti from the air that you breathe in. That prana shakti awareness becomes the link for you to move from the gross to the subtle experience of yoga.

Until you are aware of the pranic movement, prana shakti, or the influence of prana, you cannot really control the mind. If you think that you can sit and turn off the mind and stop its moving, try it. Mind is much more powerful than you ever can be. The funny part is that the thought, 'I will control my mind', comes from the mind itself. So, who is going to control whom? Will the mind control itself? No. Therefore, you become more sensitive to prana and as a result of that you become more sensitive to the activity of the subtle forces in the mind which arise in the form of thoughts, feelings, responses, impressions, archetypes, symbols, knowledge and emotions. To perfect any kind of experience in life, you have to work with prana shakti. In the absence of working with prana shakti, trying to manage your mind is a futile exercise.

Five dimensions

In yogic theories, you find that a human being lives in five different dimensions, *koshas*, and has five different experiences. These are *annamaya*, the body of matter;

pranamaya, the body of vital force, energy; *manomaya*, the body of mind; *vijnanamaya*, the body of the psyche and consciousness; and *anandamaya*, the body or dimension of the spirit. These are the five dimensions in which you function knowingly or unknowingly, twenty-four hours a day. Your tentacles, your reach, is in all these five dimensions.

When you drive a car, many activities happen simultaneously. There is no definition as to when this activity will convert to another activity. Sometimes while you are pressing the accelerator you are also pressing the clutch. Sometimes when you are pressing the clutch you are changing the gear, another activity altogether. It is happening in harmony and coordination with other activities. The same thing happens in this multidimensional existence of the individual. While you are living in the material dimension, activity is taking place in the *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya* dimensions simultaneously. You are not aware of these activities until you direct your mind to be aware of them. This directing of the mind to become aware of the subtle activities is the beginning of yoga, then come *pratyahara* and *dharana*.

Four horses of the mind

Pranayama and prana shakti become the gateway for us to move from material into subtle states of experience. The beginning of yoga is awareness of the *pranamaya* kosha and then working with *manomaya* and *vijnanamaya*, mind and consciousness. When I was young, my Guru told me a simple story and asked me to interpret it.

Once upon a time, there was a king who had four wild horses, untrained and totally undisciplined. The king proclaimed throughout his kingdom that any horse trainer could come to train these four wild horses and if they were trained properly, fit for the king to ride, the horse trainer would be given lots of rewards and be established in life. Due to the reward many people came and they all tried to ride the horses. Of course the horses rebelled. They rejected the foreign elements and threw the riders off their backs. Many riders received broken arms and legs; nobody was successful.

After many months, all the experts of the kingdom had tried their fate. The king gave up hope, until one day a young man came and said to the king, "Permit me to try training these horses." The king looked at the young handsome person and asked, "Are you sure you want to try? Many have come before you and all have failed. Some have broken arms and legs, some have broken heads, some have even lost their lives. Are you willing to take the risk?" The young man said, "Yes but only under one condition. You give these horses to me for a period of one year and I will bring them back to you after one year fully trained." The king agreed.

The young man took the horses and went away; time passed. Weeks became months and months became a year, and even the year passed. The king gave up hope. One day, he heard the sound of hooves. He looked out through the window and saw the four beautiful horses in perfect line, trotting together and one man sitting on the front horse, leading them. The king was happy. He called the young man and said, "I am very happy that you brought the horses back, but tell me how did you train them and why did you ask for one year's time?"

The young man said, "Sir, the horses were wild, no doubt. Everyone tried to put on the bridle and saddle, and tried to capture the horses right from day one. When I took your permission to take the horses away with me, I let them roam free. If they ran, I ran with them. If they rested, I rested with them. If they slept, I would also go to sleep. If they drank water, I would have my tea and breakfast. When they ate grass, I had my supper. In this way the horses began to think that I was a strange fifth horse with them. Then one day I put my hand on the back of a horse. He did not like it, jumped away from me, yet slowly he got used to me placing my hand on his back. Then one day I put a blanket. They did not like it, yet in the course of time, they got used to the blanket. I put the bridle. They did not like it yet got used to it. Gradually and slowly, I cultivated friendship with the horses and today due to that friendship I am able to ride them."

You have four horses in you too. Are you their friend or do you try to subdue them? Manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara

are the four wild horses. When you try to ride them you jump on their back and start galloping. That is what you want to do. You want to become an instant master of yourself. You do not want to work hard, you want to become the instant master and rule, subdue, control and dominate. That is the cause of your failure, for you do not want to become a friend to yourself.

That is the sutra of pratyahara. The horse is enticing you, 'ride me, ride me'. The moment you get on the horse, it jumps and throws you off. When you have fallen, again the mind will say, 'come on, get up and ride me'. Again it will throw you. The lesson of pratyahara is that you must become a friend to your mind. When you become a friend to the mind, the mind will respond to your instructions. As long as you are not a friend to the mind, you will be struggling and fighting. This is one reason why, despite going through the practical process and sadhana, people have not been able to experience their spiritual nature.

Components of Yoga

23 February 2007, Satya Sai Auditorium,
Koramangala, Bangalore

My intention is to discuss the subject matter of yoga so that you can understand what it really means to your life in your present-day situation and circumstances. Every person in the world is trying to achieve excellence in life by trying to do what they do best and thereby attain peace, prosperity and health. Health, peace and prosperity are what you try to acquire in life. This is the direction in which you are moving. Yoga plays a major role in acquiring this physical and personal health. It plays a major role in acquiring mental peace and awakening the dormant potentials that reflect the spiritual nature of an individual.

Before you understand yoga and the yogic process, try to understand human life first and where you are at present. According to scriptures, only through God's grace can one attain a human body – *Bade bhag manus tana parva*. We have acquired a body, yet acquiring a healthy body is difficult – and not only this physical body, for according to yogic terminology, body means the entire human personality, the entire individuality which makes you what you are.

Gunas

This body or this personality is subject to the influences of the gunas. The most predominant *guna*, or quality in life, is tamoguna. It is not a negative quality, but a state of experience and existence you are subject to. Rajoguna is also a state of existence and the experience is not difficult in itself,

you become subject to it in the course of life. *Sattwa guna* is the state of life, existence, and experience which has been identified as the state of luminosity and wisdom, balance, harmony and equilibrium.

From tamoguna to sattwa

Tamoguna has been identified as the conditioned nature of mind, feelings and emotions, of life and the expectations that come from this conditioning. You should not understand tamoguna in a derogatory sense. Tamoguna is the conditioned state of existence where you become what you are today – an individual with a particular mentality, character, ambition and nature.

The best example of tamoguna and sattwa guna is that of an earthen pot. To make an earthen pot you first take some clay. In the original state, that lump of clay has no shape but it has all the potential to become anything that you want to create with it. Sattwa represents the pure state where no form has yet taken shape, and everything is in a fluid and free state of existence. In the process of preparing the clay, mixing it with water, kneading it, you move from sattwa to *rajas*, the state of activity, dynamism, motion, creation and manifestation. Once the pot is made, you fire the pot in the oven and the shape becomes definite. This is the state of *tamas* where the personality, the character has become defined; it has taken shape.

The only way you can change that personality is by dropping the earthen pot to the ground and breaking it. That is the only way you can manage yourself. You have to drop yourself at times in order to break certain conditionings. You have to subject yourself to certain changes in life which can create shocks or transformation within you. Life is governed by tamoguna, the conditioned nature in which the spontaneous, natural and free expression of human consciousness is restricted. Yoga comes in at this point, as a *sadhana*, a process which allows you to move from the *tamas* state towards *sattwa* state, in which the conditioned nature of existence is transcended. The old and restricted

conditionings are released, broken down, new blood is infused in the personality in which the conditioning is of a different kind. It is a more sattwic conditioning.

The dog trick

Looking from the perspective of the reality experienced in life, and not as a philosophy, you realize that the conflicts, confusions, illnesses and diseases that you experience in your life are the outcome of *tamas*. You subject yourself to stress, knowingly or unknowingly. You cannot manage a simple state of stress and anxiety that manifests in your life as a disorder, illness, disease. One slight change in the mental behaviour becomes stress that you cannot handle. Your mind has become so weak and debilitated that you are easily affected by the opinions of other people. You put a label on yourself, 'I am fragile, handle with care'. You are influenced by the opinions of other people.

One day in Munger, a man said, "I have hypertension and I have tried every method, every medication to lower the hypertension but nothing has helped. Can yoga provide a solution?" I said, "Do you remember how you got hypertension, was it mismanagement of stress?" The person said, "No. It was not the mismanagement of stress, stress caught me unawares." I said, "What happened, tell me the story." He said, "Well Swamiji, I retired about six months ago from a lucrative post in the Government. After retirement there is no occupation, so I made a routine. I would sit in my house every morning after breakfast, read the newspaper, watch the morning news and then maybe walk a little bit, visit old friends or go to library to read some books or magazines. In this manner I set my day." I said to him, "Well, it seems that you lead a relaxed life and many people would envy you for leading this kind of relaxed life. How did you get hypertension?"

He said, "One day while I was sitting on the sofa, reading my newspaper and watching the morning news, my daughter-in-law was sweeping the floor in the sitting room. She was in a foul mood as she fought with her husband. While cleaning,

in her anger she looked at me and said, “He sits there the whole day like a dog.” That gave me a big shock. I swooned, I fainted, and when I came out of my swoon, I checked my blood pressure, and it was high, and since then it is high. Can yoga help me?” I said, “No, yoga cannot help you, only you can help yourself. Change your perspective, your viewpoint.” He looked at me and said, “I don’t understand.”

I told him, “When your daughter-in-law said you were like a dog, what image of a dog did you create in your mind?” The man said, “Oh, you know the street dog, the limping one, the flea-ridden one, the dog with three legs.” I said to him, “Look, your daughter-in-law is not the cause of your hypertension, your imagination is the cause.” He said, “Then what do I do?” I said, “Continue thinking that you are a dog. This time instead of a street dog, become the Alsatian of the house, the German Shepherd who lives in total luxury, doesn’t have to work hard, sleeps in an air-conditioned room and travels in an air-conditioned car, and who has his food delivered to him on time. I mean, imagine you are a very lucky dog.”

The man looked at me thinking, “That swami must be out of his mind”. Nevertheless, when I saw him after one month, he said, “Swamiji, my high blood pressure has gone.” “How did you do it? Which medication did you take?” I had completely forgotten about the man and his story. He said, “I followed your advice.” “My advice?” “Yes, you told me to become a better dog, I have become a better one.”

This is a true story, as an example of how you are easily affected by what other people say. Even though they may say things because they are affected by their own moods, yet you take that upon yourself. That is the weakness of mind and the dissipated nature of mind. When the mind is focused and concentrated, it develops inner strength; when the mind is dissipated it becomes weak. In human society today, people do not have strong minds but weak minds.

According to yoga, if you are able to improve the quality of your mind you have nothing to worry about in life. You will succeed in everything and anything that you do, in your professional, personal and spiritual life. Dealing with the

mind and training yourself to manage the mind has been the subject matter of ashtanga yoga, or the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. All yogas have one aim, aspiration, direction, and each yoga takes you towards that particular direction that it has decided for itself.

Raja yoga

Hatha yoga takes you towards balance and harmony of the two forces, prana shakti and chitta shakti. Raja yoga gives you the ability to manage the dissipated nature of mind in a better way. Kundalini yoga takes you towards psychic awakening within your personality. Kriya yoga establishes you in an altered state of pure consciousness. In this manner each yoga has a specific aim for which the sadhanas are described.

In the raja yoga of Patanjali, the instructions given are specific and clear: by restraining your *chanchal vrittis*, the highly excited mental modifications, you can awaken the strength and shakti within the mind. You can use that power to discover your inner *swabhava*, nature. These statements are reflected in the first three sutras of the *Yoga Sutras*:

Athah yoga anushasanam.

Now, therefore, complete instructions regarding yoga.

Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah.

To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.

Tadaa drashtuh svaroope'vasthaanam.

Then the seer is established in his own essential nature.

In these three sutras the entire direction of the process of raja yoga is described.

Atha yoga anushasanam implies that to perfect the learning and discipline is yoga. What is the outcome of perfecting this learning and discipline? You are able to contain the mental modifications – *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*. What is the outcome of having contained, your destructive, dissipated, disturbed

mental modifications or vrittis? You begin to realize your true nature – *Tadaa drashtuh svaroope'vasthaanam*. You realize your *svaroopa*, your true nature. This true nature of yours is not the conditioned nature that you are living at present; it is the unconditional nature of existence, the sattwic existence, not the tamasic. This is the yogic journey of the raja yoga of Patanjali. After this, the process, systems and practices are described, and the theory is described of what vrittis are and how to manage them.

The garden

For yoga to become beneficial in life you need to prepare the ground of your personality. It is not good enough to go to a yoga class, practise asana, pranayama, relaxation and say 'I have done my yoga for the day'. That is not the aim of the yogic process. For yoga to become effective in life, you have to prepare the ground of your mind and nature. Before you farm, you have to prepare the earth, loosen it, remove the weeds rocks and stones. Only when the earth is ready, the hardness gone, and the soil has become loose, do you plant the seeds.

Once upon a time, a priest went to a desert and acquired a piece of land which was rocky and barren. It only had shrubs of nettle and thorns. The priest put in a lot of effort in cleaning the area and converting that barren land into a beautiful, extraordinary garden. He was so proud of this garden that he used to call all his neighbours to come and admire it. Whenever his neighbours would come he used to be happy that his garden was a shining example of purushartha, which can convert a barren piece of land into a beautiful creation.

One day a stranger came, who said, "This is beautiful. Look at this lovely creation of God." The priest became angry and replied, "What lovely creation of God? This is my hard work. You should have seen this piece of land when God was the owner of it! It is through my hard work that I have converted this barren piece of land into a beautiful garden."

It is your effort and exertion, your *purushartha* and *prayatna*, your sadhana which will lead you towards perfection. Just as you have to prepare the ground to farm, you have to

prepare the ground of your nature and personality for yoga to become effective. There is lot of hardness in your mind and heart. Swami Sivananda, our paramguru, used say that a human being expresses three qualities in life: the qualities of head, heart and hands.

The head represents the intellect; the heart feelings, sentiments, emotions; and hands, performance, action, involvement and participation. Intelligence, sentiments and action are the three expressions of every human being. Integrated development of the human personality means an integrated approach to these three areas of your expression, to bring in creativity in that dimension. It is the integration of the faculties of head, heart and hands that becomes the purpose of yoga. Your head and heart, your intellect and emotions have become so self-centred that there is no scope for expansion, growth and development.

Intellect – friend or foe

At different times in your life, you imbibe different kinds of learning which build up your character, personality and nature. Your samskaras are formed before the age of eight, before you expose yourself to formal, intellectual education. The day the formal, academic education begins, the faculties of the intellect are stimulated and the other faculties, the unconscious receptors in the formation of your personality, shut down. Intellect becomes dominant in your life and remains dominant until the end of your days. When intellect becomes the dominant factor and power in your life, it is the application of this intellect which can lead you astray or on the right path. It can assist you and it can become a barrier also.

Sri Aurobindo used to say, 'In the beginning intellect was my friend. It helped me, and later on it became a barrier, therefore transcend intellect'. This statement is a fact of life, for your intelligence is shaped by the indriyas and the vishayas that are surrounding you all the time. Your intellect is shaped by the influences of your family, society and the culture in which you are living. With the development of the human intellect, spiritual growth becomes stunted. As long

as you apply your intellect to understand the spiritual nature within you, you will not be able to make any progress. Your spiritual nature is an experience not of intelligence and the linear and logical process which the intellect follows, but of inner awareness and intuition. When the intellect follows a linear and logical process and conditions itself to perceive the world in a specific way that it deems fit, it restricts your ability to become aware of other methods, other ways, other manners.

Yamas and niyamas

Raja yoga has therefore given a very simple sutra – modify this mental behaviour with the attempt to inculcate softer, improved and better qualities in life by adopting the principles of ahimsa, satya, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacharya, the five yamas; and shaucha, santosha, tapas, swadhyaya and ishwara pranidhana, the five niyamas. These yamas and niyamas help prepare the ground for the personality to attain the experience of yoga.

This teaching should not be ignored or negated by yoga practitioners. This is the first mistake yoga practitioners make. They think yamas and niyamas to be a moral code of conduct, outdated yoga ethics. You have become modern so you believe that they should not be practised. Straight away you jump into the third level, asana, and that becomes your final destination. It is for this reason that despite a growing interest in yoga, people are not able to understand what yoga has to offer. They are confining the practices of yoga to the body only, the ‘feel-fit factor’, which is confined to the body experience only. They say, ‘Today I had a backache. I did some yoga and it has gone ninety percent’; or, ‘When I woke up in the morning I had a heavy head, I did some yoga and now it feels light. So yoga works’. What kind of application is this? You are using a cannonball to kill a mosquito if this is the application of yoga in your life. After the perfection of yamas and niyamas, when the ground of the mind has been prepared to sow the new samskaras, then you begin with the practice of asanas.

You need to practise yama and niyama to change the tamasic expression of your personality. There is aggression, anxiety, violence, distraction and dissipation, the mind runs after pleasures, craves for them, works to attain them. At that time the positive forces of the personality remain dormant. When the aggressive forces become active, the positive confidence and clarity does not come forward.

When you choose an idea of ahimsa, satya, asteya, aparigraha or brahmacharya and try to incorporate it in your life as much as possible, maintain it in your awareness as much as possible during the day. Try to merge yourself with and develop that particular idea in your life, then that process is like fine-tuning a radio. When you fine-tune the radio to listen to one channel, you have to move the dial. As the dial comes close to a station the garbled sound becomes clearer and clearer until it is clear without any distortion or break. The fine-tuning of mental energies happens when you try to cultivate the opposite of what you are experiencing in your life.

If there is aggression in your nature, character, personality, then cultivate the non-aggressive behaviour, ahimsa. If there is falsity, arrogance, hypocrisy in your life, then cultivate the component of satya. If there is greed, the desire to possess, then maybe it is time to think about aparigraha. Decide whether you really need it or is it only to fulfil your ambition? In this manner, the negative side of the human character is balanced by cultivating the positive.

Then with the practice of asanas you are able to work with the energies controlling the body. Yama, niyama and asana are preparation for perfecting yoga, for yoga begins when you come to the point of pranayama.

Prana shakti

In a car there is the gearbox with the gears, first, second, third, fourth, reverse, and the way you move between gears is through neutral. From first you come to neutral then you come to second, from second you go to neutral then you go to third, from third you come to neutral then you go to fourth.

You stop the car by putting it in neutral. You go into reverse by putting the car first in neutral and then into reverse gear.

Neutral is not a gear, yet without neutral space in between the gears you cannot shift from one to the other. The same thing applies to life also. You have *annamaya kosha*, the dimension of matter which you experience; *pranamaya kosha*, the dimension of energy that is experienced; *manomaya kosha*, the dimension of mental experience; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the dimension of evolved consciousness; and *anandamaya kosha*, the dimension of spirit or spiritual experiences. These are the five dimensions in which a human being lives at any given moment. In these five dimensions, *pranamaya kosha* acts like the neutral space for you to move between *annamaya* to *manomaya*, from *manomaya* to *vijnanamaya*, from *vijnanamaya* to *anandamaya*. To move from any one state towards the next you have to use the faculty of *prana shakti*, the vital force.

For the sake of understanding let us just believe that the dimension of energy is like the neutral space in the gearbox. With the activation of this energy, you have access to the physical body, the mental body, consciousness and the spiritual body. Therefore, the subject of *prana* has been emphasized in yoga. It is only in the practice of *pranayama* that you begin to practise yoga in earnest. *Pranayama* means expanding the awareness and dimension of the vital force.

The vital force is something like electricity, wind power, solar power. It cannot be classified and quantified. It is a force, the life-force. When the embryo is in the womb, how does it survive without breathing, without air? It survives on *prana* which it receives from the mother. The first breath is taken only when the baby is born, yet even without breathing inside the womb the baby is alive. That is the role that *prana shakti* plays, the vital force.

In the Upanishads there is a story. One day all the organs and senses in the body started a debate about who was greater amongst them all. The eyes said, "We are great, because of us the body is able to see and perceive the world." Touch said, "I am great. Because of me the body can experience

and feel the world.” The tongue, the nose and the ears said, “We are great – because of us the body can taste, smell and hear.” Prana shakti listened and quietly withdrew itself from the body. The senses started to cry and slowly their power decreased. They all shouted, “Stop. Come back, you are the greatest because without you none of us could live.”

Yoga has many components which are interconnected and lead to a complete experience of yoga and your own self. Therefore, if your practice integrates these components in a balanced way, you will feel the result as balance and harmony in your day-to-day life.

Where Do We Go From Here?

24 February 2007, Talk to Young Presidents Organization,
Hotel Ista, Bangalore

When we ask ourselves the purpose of our life, ultimately, three things are relevant. The first is *sanyam*, knowing how to restrain ourselves. In the absence of restraint, there is no end to ambitions. These eventually lead one astray and destroy peace of mind and the feeling of contentment. The second purpose is developing the qualities of the heart. A human being is a combination of the faculties of head, heart and hands: intellect, sentiments and action. Most often, we highlight the use and faculties of the intellect, and relegate the faculties of the heart – sentiments and feelings – to the background, thinking that if we express them, people will consider us weak and manipulate us.

The third purpose is to help others, to look beyond actions and performances that are self-centred and self-oriented and are intended to fulfil our own needs. So these are the three components that have to be managed: restraint, cultivation of the softer qualities of life, and learning to lend a helping hand. If you adopt any of the three as your aim in life and cultivate that particular attitude and mentality, you will discover that the vacuum that you feel after having attained the peak of material prosperity is filled. This is the message given in the Upanishads as well.

Practise restraint

Now, let us analyze the first component, restraint. There are too many distractions inherent in the modern lifestyle. We want to play with every new thing that comes on to the market

because it helps us boost our self-image, our ego. It is no doubt true that money brings vices with it. The outcome of acquiring material prosperity is gaining vices because you now have more confidence in the green paper than in your own abilities. And when you lack inner confidence, the mind, body and the family fabric become weak. Confusion, stress and anxiety become the order of the day. This is constantly happening to us. We are unable to manage pressures and stresses. We are unable to manage our own dissatisfactions, and there is always a craving to find the missing link. We are always trying to find something that will make us more fulfilled, contented and happy.

Yoga says that if we are able to restrain some of the dissipated and destructive flow of energy and action, we will become more creative. But how can one acquire the quality of restraint? There is a practical method, a theory, which I call the SWAN principle. SWAN is an acronym standing for Strength, Weakness, Ambition and Need. To practise it, on a sheet of paper, make a list of all your strengths in one column, all your positive qualities. In another column make a list of all your weaknesses and shortcomings that you feel inhibit your growth and clarity of mind. Then make a list of your ambitions. Even if you want to acquire the moon, write it down. Make another list of your immediate needs and long-term needs, the bare minimum that you require in order to lead a fulfilled and satisfied life. Maintain these four lists, look at them from time to time, and cross out and add until you are satisfied that they reflect a true picture of your character and personality.

Now, pick out one strength and cultivate that to the maximum. Do not go overboard, use your common sense. Next, pick out one weakness, and try to overcome it in one month. Try to analyze an ambition. Does it reflect your innermost desire or not? Try to analyze your needs, and find a balance between your ambitions and needs. Transcend and overcome one weakness, cultivate one strength, and find a balance between ambition and need. Spend five minutes every day doing this; sit down quietly by yourself when you come home and reflect upon this. In this way, with the development of an awareness of your performances during the day, you will

be able to develop a good structure of restraint. You will be able to function using optimum strength, having transcended the weaknesses and debilities of the personality, and knowing the difference between need and ambition.

Develop the qualities of the heart

The second point is developing the soft qualities of life. People have always believed that brilliance or genius is determined by the highest IQ. However, in this century, people are not thinking about IQ any more. They are thinking about EQ, emotional quotient. You can no doubt raise your level of intelligence, but at what cost? Besides, such development of intelligence is directed towards material understanding, not personal understanding.

A basic flaw in our life is that we are not educated. I am not talking about degrees and diplomas. In university, school and college, we are educated to cultivate, nurture and develop the intellect, but we do not have any experience of life. Nobody has taught us how to face problems and stresses. Nobody has told us: “Whenever you are under stress, lie down on the bed or on the ground and count your breath back from 30 to 1.” We do not know a simple thing like that. We study medicine, law and science, for an MBA, but we do not study human character and behaviour, or how to modify them. This is a great flaw in our education system, and it will take its toll on humanity one day when we discover that we are unable to face even the least amount of tension and stress.

Developing EQ, the emotional quotient, making our feelings more expansive and soft, is another direction in which life has to develop, especially in the case of achievers. You need to have a philosophy of life, which need not be a religious belief. It is irrelevant what religious path you follow or whether you are a believer or non-believer. You need to have a philosophy in life which guides your performance and defines your aspiration.

What kind of a philosophy should that be? It should be to overcome the negative traits and restrictive qualities of life and to cultivate the benevolent and peaceful aspects. How do you do it? Practise 10 minutes of meditation every night before going to sleep. This is an effort you should make for

the sake of your own sanity and peace. Allot 23 hours and 50 minutes to your society, family, profession, the world, and ten minutes for your peace, benefit, tranquillity and sense of wellbeing. For these ten minutes, sit down quietly and develop a thought or idea in the mind: 'For these ten minutes I am not this body, nor the experience of comfort and discomfort associated with the body. I am not the mind, nor the experience of pleasure and pain that arise in the mind.' Try to create total disidentification, total disconnection from the physical and the mental experiences. Now, if you are not the body, if you are not the mind, then what are you? Just yourself, nothing more. And in that experience of yourself, experience the space, the stability, the silence inside.

Next, quickly review the activities of the day: 'I woke up at this time in the morning, I had this for breakfast, I wore this, I read this, I saw this, I spoke this, I did this, I did that.' If you find a challenging situation in which you reacted in a particular manner, then hold the reel there for few moments. Freeze the recording, look at it, and think how you will react if you encounter the same situation again. In a better way or in a worse way?

If you continue to do this every day for a month, you will find that your responses have changed. Instead of going like a bull in a china shop and shattering everything around, you are more careful, more conscious, more aware of what you are doing and more in control of your responses. You will be better able to manage your levels of stress by acknowledging them and saying, "Tomorrow I will find a better way to deal with this situation. I will not subject myself to the same agony that I underwent today." Cultivation of awareness will take place with this meditation. After having reviewed the activities of the day, observe the flow of the natural breath for five minutes, and take long, deep and slow breaths. This completes your ten-minute meditation practice.

You do not need to replace other practices or rituals that you may or may not be following. Include this meditation as a habit in your life, not as something you are forced to do. Without any complication, in a very simple manner, sit down,

become still, disidentify from the body and the mind, review the activities of the day, analyze, say to yourself, “Tomorrow I will deal with this situation in a better way,” plan, observe the breath, relax and stop. That is the meditation.

As you become more aware of your unconscious reactions and responses through this process, you will find that you begin to cultivate the softer qualities of life. These qualities come with understanding, with putting oneself in others’ shoes, knowing the difficulties that they are facing, and trying to find a compromise, balance and harmony between them, between your aspirations and others’ performance.

Lend a helping hand

To lend a helping hand is the most important thing in life, as it allows you to connect with other beings. Humanity is one single club; there is no elite group and no deprived group. The groups may exist socially and economically, but as part of the life experience that we are all undergoing, there is no separation. Some people have had the opportunity to express themselves and others have not had such an opportunity. When their time comes, they too will shine. After all, it is the same brain, the same mind, the same force in each and every one; the application depends on the opportunities that one gets in life.

Swami Sivananda was an advocate of humanity. By profession he was a medical doctor, but he left his lucrative practice to become a sannyasin. And he became a sannyasin of the highest quality. There is a difference between those who take sannyasa because they are committed and those who are escaping from life. There are people who take sannyasa to escape from life, and there are people who take sannyasa because they want to commit themselves to help others grow and prosper. There are many who belong to the first category and a few who belong to the second. Swami Sivananda had only one aim in mind, “How can I help another person attain health, peace and prosperity?” And it is his teachings that are being lived in the institutions that are created in his name, Sivananda Math and the ashram.

Paramahamsaji also says that there is much hypocrisy in our lives. Life should be innocent, simple and joyous. We put on different masks every moment to project ourselves in a particular way. Even when we look at ourselves in the mirror, we have the masks on. We want to see ourselves differently, not as we are. We become so used to seeing ourselves in the mask that when we remove it, we do not recognize ourselves any more. “Am I really like this?” is the question that comes.

The only way we can feel free internally is by experiencing oneness, *atmabhava*, being able to see ourselves in other people. This is when we begin to understand them and their situations. Having come to this point, if we are capable, we should help them out. If not, we should direct them to somebody else. But a movement of cooperation must take place between human beings, not to satisfy our egos, but to help others come out of their misery.

There is a famous saying: “If a person is hungry, don’t give him fish to eat, but teach him how to fish.” This has been the principle of Swami Sivananda. He did not believe in charity; he said that charity is the mother of poverty, of dependence, weakness. He always emphasized the role of *purushartha*, self-effort, self-empowerment. To lend a helping hand, therefore, means that you empower another person to manage and look after their own life and be responsible for their peace and prosperity. This is the actual meaning of the phrase ‘lend a helping hand’. And this is the idea of service or *seva*.

Paramahamsaji tells us, “If you go to the market to buy shoes or clothes for your two children, instead of buying two pairs, buy three. Two for your own children and one for the unknown child that you have adopted in your mind.” There are enough deprived people in the world to whom you can give that pair of shoes or that uniform, and they will cherish it for the rest of their lives. They will always remember the kindness showered upon them. If every affluent citizen looks after the needs of one deprived citizen, in ten years there will be no poverty anywhere.

All you have to do is see yourself in that deprived state. We are very fortunate that we have enough to eat and also to

waste. Eighty percent of the population in this country does not have a square meal a day. They are our fellow beings who need some encouragement, who need to know that they have not missed all the opportunities in life and that somebody is looking after them. If this becomes your one activity in life, you will die happy, knowing that you have brought smiles to one person or family. When you have this realization, it will be a day of great satisfaction.

What next?

The three concepts of restraint, developing the softer qualities of the heart and clarity of mind, and lending a helping hand, provide a definite direction and purpose to life, which acquisition of material prosperity cannot do. Today, we do need a direction in life. In this context, yoga assumes significance. Yoga is not what you read, hear about or see in the media. Yoga is a lifestyle, it is an attitude of the mind, it is the cultivation of the best that a human personality can offer. Yoga is developing and integrating the faculties of head, heart and hands. Yoga provides a method; it is also a tool to discover the excellence within. Once we discover the excellence, efficiency, clarity, awareness and understanding within, they reflect in our outer behaviour, in our performance and actions, and in our way of thinking.

By following these three simple precepts, we begin to involve ourselves in the practice of yoga. Making a list of our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, and being objective about it, is *swadhyaya*, self-observation. When you do not know how to control the frustrations and anxieties of life, what is the use of trying to find something which goes beyond the realm of thought and idea? One has to prepare the ground, like a farmer prepares the ground to sow seeds. Unless the ground is prepared, you can throw high quality seeds on it and they will never flower. But if the ground is prepared, there is a possibility that the majority of the seeds will flower. So prepare the ground. It is by following these precepts that I have been able to overcome the question “What next?” and you will be able to, too.

Danatvam or Giving

24 February 2007, Atma Darshan Yogashram, Bangalore

One day when Paramahamsaji was performing his panchagni sadhana, he got up from his sadhana and called Swami Satyasangananda and said, “In a nearby village a house has burned down. The husband died in the fire, the wife has become a widow. She has three little kids. They don’t have any place to live. They don’t have anything to eat. Monsoon is coming. Locate this family and organize a house for them, food and clothes.”

Unconditional love

He only said this much. How did he know that something had happened? He was doing his sadhana, doing his japa, how did he know that a few hours ago in some remote village a fire had taken place, and this situation had happened? It took Swami Satyasangananda about four days to locate the village and the person. Everything was exactly as Paramahamsaji had described. Immediately a shelter was made for that family, food and clothes were brought and they felt settled. We never asked Paramahamsaji how he knew what had happened.

About six years later, somebody asked a question to Paramahamsaji, “Does God hear our prayers and does he help the human being after listening to their prayers?” Paramahamsaji gave a beautiful answer, “The telegram of prayer reaches God. God looks at this telegram and then looks for a person who is capable to help the person in need. Then he diverts the telegram to that person.” In your life

also, it may have happened that sometimes a stranger has come, has helped you overcome a certain situation, and then disappeared from your life completely.

In the life of people who suffer, the cry of their agony, pain and suffering does reach God. He diverts the telegram to a person who is capable of helping and is in their vicinity; this can only happen when there is care, concern and love. Six years later, when I heard this answer of Paramahamsaji, my mind went back to that event, and I told myself, 'The prayer, the pain and suffering of this lady had reached God. She called out for help when everything was being burned, when her husband died in the fire and when she and her children were left homeless, without shelter and food. When God heard the call, he simply diverted the telegram to Swami Satyananda who was meditating. God flashed this vision and inspiration, and described in detail what had happened'.

This is an example of unconditional love. Love which transcends the sensorial, sensual, emotional, mental, physical and social dimensions. Love which helps to uplift one in life is the unconditioned love expressed after one has attained the state of sthitaprajna.

When you love somebody unconditionally, you are ready to sacrifice yourself for the welfare of that person. When you love the human society unconditionally, you are willing to sacrifice yourself for the welfare of society, you are willing to help others overcome the *abhavas*, the absences of facilities in their life. Giving also purifies.

Message of the Creator

There is a story in the Upanishads. Three representatives – one of the gods, one of the demons and one of humankind – went to receive a mandate from the Creator, as to how they should live their lives. When the Creator saw the three of them, he said, "Here comes trouble," and disappeared. The three continued on their journey seeking guidance from the Creator, and finally they heard thunder in the clouds. After hearing the thunder, they went back to their people. When the representatives reached their respective places there were big gatherings.

The gods gathered and asked their ambassador, “Did you get any message?” The demons gathered and ask their representative, “Did you get any message?” The humans came together and asked the human representative, “What message do you have for us?” Each one said, “Yes, I have heard a message.” In the thundering clouds, the godly ambassador heard, “Damatvam, damatvam, damatvam.” In the thunder of clouds, the demons heard, “Dayatvam, dayatvam, dayatvam.” In the thunder of the clouds the human representative heard, “Danatvam, danatvam, danatvam.” The message for the gods was damatvam, the message for the demons was dayatvam, and the message for humans was danatvam. What is the meaning of this?

You know the lifestyle of gods is the yuppy-culture. The five-star culture. Heaven is a huge five-star hotel. You are allowed to live there and enjoy the pleasures of heaven, the food, the dance, the girls and the beauty – as long as you have your credit card with you which is that of *punya*, virtue. The day your virtue is finished and there is zero bank balance, you are thrown out of heaven to go back, earn more and again come. The message for the gods was, ‘Learn to restrain yourself. Learn to control yourself, be self-restrained – *daman karmah damatvam*’.

The demons are violent, aggressive, murderers, cut-throats, pocket-cutters, who destroy happiness. Today demons are called terrorists. The message for them was. ‘Learn to be compassionate’. Don’t take away the happiness or joy from another person’s life. Try to increase their happiness through your compassion and kindness. *Dayatvam*, become compassionate.

For humans the message was, ‘Learn how to give – *danatvam*’. Humans are the only beings of this creation who know how to receive and not how to give. This story in the Upanishads was written many thousands of years ago, which means that the human trait has always been a self-centred, self-oriented one. In the history of humankind, there has never yet been an expansive human nature; we have always thought about ourselves only. In the process of thinking about

ourselves, all we have done is accumulate and accumulate. Whatever we have accumulated has an emotional sentiment attached to it. Even a pen, which you received ten years ago from a friend, you would not like to part with it, as there is an emotional association attached to it – a pen. We attach ourselves too easily and too frequently with everything and anything that comes along our path.

Accumulation is the human nature. Learning how to let go, how to reduce attachment is reflected in the giving nature. When you are able to live the three principles of serve, love and give, then internal purification takes place as mentioned in *Bhagavad Gita* (5:11): *Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye* – For inner purification, for purification of the spirit, mind and existence in general, yogis perform karma without any attachment. This purity endows you with all the positive and sattwic qualities in life; it makes you good. When you become good, you begin to do good. Then a natural introspection and meditation happens, in which you become part of that divine energy.

That cosmic, divine energy comes alive in you; that godly energy comes alive in you. You become endowed with the *shakti*, the power of God – as an expression of life, as the quality of generation, organization and destruction, transformation, or change. This energy is the spirit of God. Generation, organization and transformation come alive in you. You become self-realized. This is the expressive side of yoga, the Sivananda yoga, whereas the sadhanatmak side of yoga is the Patanjali yoga. Whenever you practise yoga, remember that ultimately you have to move from the perfection of sadhana into a harmonious expression of your achievements. That is the fulfilment of life.

Yoga – a Way of Life

24 February 2007, Satya Sai Auditorium,
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Yoga has to be treated as a subject or science of life and not as a practice which you do for one hour every day. To understand the yogic process of inner transformation and development of life, you have to see yoga in different stages. When you first come to practise yoga, you come because of a need and that need is your personal need. You may be suffering from stress, anxiety or having problems with the heart, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, or other physical or psychological imbalances. When you come to yoga, you come with an expectation that you will help yourself heal the body and the mind. At that moment, yoga is not a subject of life, nor are you concerned about it. You just want to help yourself feel better physically, remove the distress and imbalance from life and acquire optimum health. With your yoga, you are able to manage your illness and difficulty. You acquire the capacity and strength to manage the imbalances of life and you begin to feel happy about it.

The day you feel happy that you have achieved something your yoga practice stops, as there is no further need of yoga in your life. You applied it to improve a certain physiological or psychological condition, and with that achieved the role of yoga is over. This is yoga practice – on and off, on and off. There is a gap, a break, discontinuity. After a few months or years when you are suffering again from some problem, difficulty, imbalance or illness, a vague memory comes up in the back of your mind that yoga was beneficial, and you try

again. The majority of people in the world are followers of yoga in this pattern.

Yoga sadhana

There is another dimension of yoga, the yogic sadhana – when you are not practising yoga to attain physical or psychological needs but you practise yoga to attain the aim as defined by yogic processes. Each yoga has a particular aim and has defined a process for itself. The purpose of raja yoga is control over the mind and awakening the dormant potentials of the mind. What is the *lakshya*, the *udeshya*, the aim of raja yoga? To acquire the ability to control the fluctuating mind – *chitta vritti nirodhah* – by bringing in components of discipline and restraint in your life which is *anushasana*. When you bring in the components of restraint and discipline, and restructure, regulate and realign your life to the natural laws, then managing the dissipated nature of the mind becomes possible. That is yoga of mind management or raja yoga.

The aim of hatha yoga is balance and harmony between the twin forces of *prana shakti* and *chitta shakti*, the vital energy and mental energy. Balance between the solar energy, vitality, dynamism, motion, activity and the passive mental energy, the thinking, rationalizing faculty is the aim of hatha yoga. The aim of bhakti yoga is emotion management. Just as the aim of raja yoga is mind management, the aim of bhakti yoga is managing your own emotions. The aim of kundalini yoga is to access the otherwise inaccessible psychic personality or the psychic nature.

In this way each yoga has defined for itself a direction and the attainment of that aim takes place when you adhere to the yogic practices with the purpose of acquiring the defined aim. This becomes yoga sadhana. When you do yoga for controlling your mind, that is yoga sadhana of raja yoga. When you practise yoga to harmonize the energies in the body and mind, that becomes the yoga sadhana of hatha yoga. When you make an attempt to develop objectivity and remain free from attachments, results or the outcome of action and reaction, the cultivation of this attitude becomes karma yoga, developing immunity to the karmas.

The moment you begin to follow the path outlined by the yogas without your personal expectations coming in between and interfering with the process, it is called yoga sadhana. When your personal expectations take priority and the yogic aspirations take the back seat, that is yoga practice.

Yoga lifestyle and culture

The third aspect is yogic lifestyle. When you incorporate the yogic principles, attitudes and mentality in your daily routine, then that is known as the yogic lifestyle. Your life actions are guided by your inner wisdom and not by the rules or conditions set by your household or society. When yoga becomes a part of your lifestyle, you become a vibrant participant in society and your family. You may consider that you are an active participant in your family now, yet not completely, not one hundred percent, for you lack the strength and character which can improve the quality of your life. Once the quality of life is improved by following the precepts of yoga in the normal routine, yoga becomes a balanced and harmonious lifestyle.

When you begin to express yoga through your lifestyle day in and day out, naturally and spontaneously, without any effort, you begin to express the human qualities that are inherent within you. That becomes the yogic culture.

These are the four stages of progression in yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna questions Sri Krishna about samadhi (2:54):

*Sthitaprajnasya kaa bhaashaa samaadhisthasya keshava;
Sthitadheeh kim prabhaashet kimaaseeta vrajeta kim.*

What O Krishna, is the description of him who has steady wisdom and is merged in the superconscious state? How does one of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

Sri Krishna gives a beautiful answer which will help you to clarify many of the questions in relation to yoga, meditation and the higher experiences of meditation called samadhi.

People think that samadhi is being lost in the contemplation of the Self. You lose yourself totally and completely so that there is no body consciousness, world consciousness, no time consciousness, no space consciousness, yet this definition or understanding of samadhi is a misconception.

Samadhi means something totally different in the context of sadhana, not realization or merging oneself with the object of contemplation; it means somebody who has equipoised mind and intelligence. The concept and the definition of samadhi is contained in the word *sthitaprajna*. *Prajna* means wisdom and *sthita* means one who is established in. The word *sthitaprajna* as questioned by Arjuna means the person who has attained the stability of wisdom. This is the key to understanding the state of samadhi, stability in wisdom, which is the outcome of dhyana.

Accessing subtle dimensions

Yoga begins with the practice of pranayama as it is the time when you begin to access the subtle dimension of your nature, the energy structure, the energy dimension of your existence. Prior to pranayama everything that is happening is physical and attitudinal. You are only trying to prepare the ground for the advanced practice of yoga. With pranayama you move into higher yoga, a subtle level of yoga where you move from the *annamaya* experience, the material experience, to the pranic, energetic experience.

The next stage is *pratyahara*, developing the skills to relax, become aware, focus and concentrate. Relaxing is not difficult. Cultivating awareness is not difficult. Concentrating is not difficult. You only have to find the point within yourself where it can happen naturally and spontaneously. Sunlight is everywhere, however that sunlight does not burn anything. If you take a magnifying glass and focus the sunlight on a dry leaf or a piece of paper, the concentrated rays of the sun will create so much heat that the paper or leaf will begin to burn in the course of time. Sunlight is there all the time, yet in order to create energy and concentrate the energy of the sun's rays you have to use a magnifying glass in the correct position,

with all the rays focused to a point. Then you can generate enough energy, enough heat, to burn whatever is underneath that point of light – a dry leaf, a piece of paper, anything.

In the same manner, you are all endowed with the same cosmic energy, force, spirit but you have not yet used your magnifying glass to bring out the power inherent in the rays of the sun. You are not different from Jesus, the Prophet Mohammed, Buddha or Ramana Maharshi. You are not different from Swami Sivananda or Swami Satyananda. We all come with the same stuff in our body, brain and mind. God did not give them anything special to make them different to the rest of the human community. These people were able to apply the magnifying glass to generate heat and burn the object by creating power. You have the strength to do that also. The actual sadhana is the placement of the magnifying glass, in spiritual terms, underneath the rays of the sun and focus the rays to a point. This happens in pratyahara through gradual perfection of the techniques and systems.

Meditation is a subject which people want to know. A yogi cannot describe to you what meditation is. A non-yogi can say whatever comes to his or her mind, yet meditation is not that. A yogi, a practitioner of yoga cannot define what meditation is for there is no such thing as meditation for you to do, perform, or experience. It is a state of being.

There are two processes in life – the process of becoming and the process of being. Your sadhana is to become, and what you are, what you have then become, is a state which you live. It is an expression of your nature and character. Meditation is a state to be lived. It is an experience of the state of being, not of the process of becoming. In the previous stages of pratyahara, dharana, pranayama or asana you are going through the process of becoming. You are trying to become; in meditation you have become.

Meditation and samadhi

Meditation can be described in the following manner as described by our Guru, Swami Satyananda: when you begin to practise so-called meditation initially, three components are

coming together in the process of learning how to meditate. You, the individual, are component number one, with all your eccentricities of mind and life. The goal of meditation that you want to achieve is component number two. The process which you adopt to meditate, to come to that point of perfection, is component number three.

The individual, the goal and the process are the three different components that have to come together when you begin meditation. When you are aware of the three simultaneously that is the state of *pratyahara*, the first step. You know that you are sitting down, you know that you are practising antar mouna or ajapa japa mantra meditation. You are aware of the goal. Whenever you practise, you know that you are sitting down, you know you are practising this technique, you know the goal that you want to attain.

As you go deeper into the meditative experience, one component of process drops off, as the process becomes a natural expression and extension of your efforts to achieve that meditative goal. Whenever you sit, you move into that process naturally, spontaneously, without effort. So two components are highlighted: the aim of meditation and the individual practising the meditation. When the idea of process drops and only two remain from three, then that becomes *dharana*, a state, an awareness which you hold and retain and which is continuous, unbroken, without any fluctuation.

As you go deeper into that meditative experience only one identity remains. You become one with the goal, you merge with the goal, you become that experience. When you become that experience, then that is *dhyana*.

One day, many years ago I was sitting quietly alone and suddenly there was a shift of consciousness. I was not this body any more. I had become a tree and that experience lasted for maybe one minute. It was the most frightening experience of my life, having absolutely no body consciousness. In the experience of having become the tree, there was a great fright: How do I breathe? How do I exist? How do I live? How do I move? Am I rooted to the same spot? The experience passed, and that was it.

That experience is the state of meditation, and that meditative state is not necessarily a pleasant one, as it happened in my case. When your personal, individual identity merges with the object of your contemplation and concentration, there is no body, no mind, there are no sensations; it is frightening. There is practically no existence although you live, your body is there but you do not feel your body as your body. How many of us have achieved that state of meditation? Nobody. If that state of identification had continued for an extended period of time, for an hour, half a day, one day or one week, it would have made my life impossible.

The state of samadhi would have made my life impossible. Samadhi is not something to be desired. When it comes to the actual confrontation with sadhana, I am sure that most of you would try to run away from the state of samadhi just as I have tried to run away from that experience.

Samadhi is just a continued experience of dhyana. The dhyana experience is momentary, the samadhi experience is unbroken and continuous. When Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, "Describe the state of samadhi," Sri Krishna said only one thing, "One who remains established in wisdom is a yogi and has experienced samadhi." That is all. Many times people confuse knowledge with wisdom. Wisdom comes by understanding knowledge. Knowledge is the process of knowing. You know the right; you know the wrong. You know the appropriate, you know the inappropriate. That knowledge, is an understanding limited to intellect only. When you begin to apply that knowledge and that knowledge becomes the beacon, the guiding light of your actions, then it becomes wisdom. Intellectual understanding is only knowledge; applied knowledge is wisdom. This is the reference of Sri Krishna: apply what you know, become firm in your convictions, become firm in your mind, and that will be the state of samadhi.

Ego: the barrier

Application of knowledge is difficult as the ego does not allow knowledge to be applied. When Sri Krishna went to the Kauravas before the war as a messenger of peace, he was

alone. Standing there in the sabha of the Kauravas he said to everyone, “Do not fight.” Duryodhana said one sentence to Sri Krishna, “Don’t tell me all that. I know what is virtue and dharma but I am not inclined towards it. I know what is vice, death and destruction but I cannot free myself from that.”

Janami dharmam na cha me pravrittih – I know what is dharma, I know what is appropriate, I know what is right, I know what is justice, I know what is morality, I know what is ethics, yet I am not inclined towards that side.

Janami adharmam na cha me nivrittih. I know what is wrong, I know what is false, I know what is injustice, I know what is adharma, but I cannot extract myself from that understanding.

Ego becomes a barrier to the dawning of wisdom in human life. There is one small, real story of an actual thing that happened in the ashram. Once when Swami Swaroopananda first came to the ashram, he was a young man, fired with fires of imagination. He said to Sri Swamiji, “Swamiji, I have come here to be enlightened.” Guruji looked at him and smiled, “All right, live in the ashram and work hard.” He said, “What, work hard? You are a siddha guru and I am, in my opinion, a good disciple. I know that if you give me a mantra I can attain enlightenment immediately through your grace. Please give me a mantra now.”

Sri Swamiji said, “Look, go easy. Take your time. Don’t be in a rush.” The young swami kept bugging him, “No, I don’t have time. I have given myself one week to be enlightened and I want you to give me a mantra.” “All right, we will see how enthusiastic you are.” The mantra that Sri Swamiji gave Swami Swaroopananda was, *Aham Brahmasami* – I am that higher consciousness. He told him to do this mantra japa as much as he could until he began to perceive the world in that nature, filled with the cosmic force and power.

Swami Sawaroopananda said to himself, “Well, I have only given myself one week so I am going to sit down twenty-four hours and do this mantra.” One day passed, three days passed, he did not come out of the room. Not for shower, not for bath, not for lunch, not for any activity. He sat there for one week without coming out of the room and when he

came out, he was glowing. He said, "Now I can see God in everything." Sri Swamiji called Swami Swaroopananda and said, "Had good sadhana?" He said, "Yes Swamiji." "What is your experience?" "Well Swamiji, after doing the mantra I see the luminosity of Brahman in everything. When I look at the leaf, I see the greenness that is Brahman. When I look at the rock, I see the strength of the rock as Brahman. When I look at an insect, I see the life in that insect as Brahman. When I look at animals, I see Brahman in them. I see Brahman everywhere. I thank you very much for the beautiful mantra you have given. It has worked."

Sri Swamiji said, "All right. One final test is remaining. Take this bag, take this money, go to the market and bring some vegetables for dinner tonight." Swami Swaroopananda, happy that guru has finally given the enlightened disciple a job, goes to the market with bag and money. Looking at everything that comes along the way, he only sees Brahman, Brahman, Brahman. When he reaches the market he sees that everyone is running away. There is a mad rush. Everyone is going in the opposite direction to him and he wonders what has happened. He stops one person and says, "What happened?" The person says to him, "There is a mad elephant in the market breaking everything. It has trampled many people and it is coming this way. You better run." Swami Swaroopananda fired with enthusiastic awareness of Brahman, thinks to himself, 'I am Brahman, the elephant is Brahman. How can one Brahman harm another Brahman? After all, when Buddha was enlightened he was able to subdue a wild elephant. So why can't I? I am as enlightened as he.' He continued on his way to the market forgetting one important factor: the elephant was not a disciple of any guru, nor had he received any mantra.

There is Swami Swaroopananda marching right up to the elephant. The elephant looks at this puny little person and thinks, 'Who is this fellow coming to see me so arrogantly? Let me teach him a lesson.' The trunk of the elephant wrapped around Swami Swaroopananda, lifted him up, whirled him around three times and dashed him to the ground. Swami Swaroopananda felt the pain of the broken bones and thought,

‘This is not samadhi!’ Somehow or other people took him to the hospital. He came back to the ashram a few hours later all bandaged and wrapped in white linen. We were all hungry, waiting for the vegetables to come for dinner, yet he came with a broken body and empty bag, abusing and swearing at everybody right, left and centre, whoever happened to cross his path.

Sri Swamiji called him and asked him what happened. He was so furious that for a few moments he could not even speak. Gradually, Swami Swaroopananda told him about the events. Sri Swamiji said to him, “Wonderful! I am happy with your attainment, to know that you were able to see Brahman in everything including a mad elephant, yet tell me one more thing. Did you not see Brahman warning you in the form of that man? You ignored the warning of that Brahman, and this is your result.”

What does this story indicate? When you are in the higher stages of realization and knowledge, you are understanding everybody, seeing and knowing everything, yet the most important warning on the path you miss. You are so caught up in your own elation and happiness that the ego uses that to obstruct your wisdom. If it is not happiness and elation, then depression, frustration, anxiety and worry – you are caught up so much in your own worries and anxieties that you miss the real turning point where you need to make a turn.

This is also evident when you look and see that door of happiness closing in front of you and become sad. You keep looking at the closed door of happiness, saying, “That door has closed, now I cannot be happy any more,” and you are worrying and crying about your loss. You fail to see that the other doors of happiness are open. You miss the opportunity. Ego is a tricky item to manage and meditation does not happen until you have subdued your ego.

Concentration and wisdom

Therefore, do not think that you meditate. You are learning how to concentrate, for in the process of concentration you have to work through the various layers of your nature. Just

like an onion has many layers and you have to peel each one, one by one, in the same manner you have to go through the layers of your personality and achieve perfection at each level of understanding, knowing and transformation. This is the subject of meditation. From this point of view, the training that you can give yourself to access the dormant mind, the unknown mind is up to *dharana* – learning how to concentrate. Concentration is a skill which can be acquired.

In the story of Dronacharya he took the Kauravas and Pandavas for a test in archery. He had placed a clay bird on top of a branch on a tree. He gave each student one arrow with the instruction to hit the eye of the bird and asked them, “What do you see?” Everyone answered in their own manner, “I see the tree, leaves, the branches, the target, the bird.” After listening to the answer of each one, Dronacharya said, “Put your bow and arrow down.” When Arjuna came, Dronacharya asked the same question, “What do you see?” Arjuna said, “I see nothing but the eye of the bird which I have to hit.”

Arjuna had nothing wrong with his eyesight. How come he did not see the other things that his brothers saw? He saw nothing except the eye that he had to hit. That is the state of concentration. When you are able to ignore or isolate the other factors of influence and keep your attention focused on one point without distraction, dissipation and disturbance then that is concentration. To achieve this much is a great human feat.

You have to apply the knowledge in your life and then applied knowledge becomes wisdom. It is the application and stability of this wisdom which gives you an awareness or the experience of the samadhi state. How do you express yourself in that state of samadhi, absorption and contemplative oneness? You still have to use the same organs, the same conditioning of the body and mind to exist, survive and live. Sri Krishna gives a beautiful answer.

Even the person who is established in wisdom lives like an ordinary human being, fulfilling the needs of the body and mind. The only difference between an unenlightened and an enlightened being is that the enlightened one acts

according to the principles of dharma and justice, and does not deviate from the path. Whereas the unenlightened person knows about dharma and justice yet is not able to follow that path to the end. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, in the most simple terms, the basic difference is shown between a person who is enlightened and aware and a person who is ordinary.

Purushartha

Everything depends on purushartha and the acquisition of grace also depends on the purushartha. Often people tell me that they are full of devotion and love. They want to know if God loves them too. I tell them, if you want God to love you, you have to fulfil certain conditions. Those conditions have been enumerated by the Lord himself.

You do not love everybody equally; there is someone for whom one millimetre more of love is there. The same with God. He does not love everybody equally. God likes people but loves only the qualified ones. What are the qualifications set by the Lord himself as to who is dear to him? In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna lists these qualifications (12:13–20):

*Adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankarah samaduhkhasukhah kshamee.*

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayah;
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

*Yasmaannodwijate loko lokaannodwijate cha yah;
Harshaamarshabhayodwegairmukto yah sa cha me priyah.*

*Anapekshah shuchirdaksha udaaseeno gatavyathah;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee yo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

*Yona hrishyati na dweshti na shochati na kaangkshati;
Shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaan yah sa me priyah.*

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhaduhkheshu samah sangavivarjitah.*

*Tulyanindaastutirmaanee santushto yena kenachit;
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaan me priyo narah.*

*Ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate;
Shraddadhaanaa matparamaa bhaktaaste'teeva me priyaah.*

He who looks upon all beings without duality, who is friendly and compassionate to all; who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving.

Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction; with the mind and intellect dedicated to Me, such a devotee of Mine is dear to Me.

He is dear to Me by whom people are not disturbed, who is not disturbed by people, and who is free from delight, anger, fear and agitation.

That bhakta is dear to Me who expects nothing from anyone, who is pure, impartial, devoid of agonies, and who renounces the feeling of doership in all undertakings.

He who does not rejoice, does not hate, does not grieve, does not desire; that man, full of bhakti, who renounces the good and bad effects of his karma, is dear to Me.

That man who is mentally balanced towards friends and enemies, likewise in honour and dishonour, in heat and cold, in pleasure and pain, and free from association with worldly objects; unto whom praise and reproach are alike.

He, who is silent, contented with whatever he has, without attachment to home and fixed in mind,

Those devotees who follow the immortal dharma, endowed with faith, regarding Me as their supreme goal, are exceedingly dear to Me.

Therefore, check your life. Do you fulfil any of the conditions enumerated by Sri Krishna so that you can become dear to God? You fail in the first one itself, *adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam*, not to see difference between people but to experience the unity of spirit within all. You live contrary to this mandate; you create divisions, castes, distinction in language, religion, and education.

How about maitri, the second qualification? Are you friendly with everyone? Are you compassionate? Go through the whole list and you will find that you are totally unqualified people and discover that God really does not love us. However, the moment you are able to acquire a single one of these qualities, you become dear to God – *yo madbhaktah sa me priyah*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes that it is the purushartha which is important, more important than grace. If purushartha is appropriate, grace will come, there is no question about it. Even if you do not want it, grace will come. Here is a story.

There was one tapasvi who practised many years of penance and sadhana with the hope of having darshan of God. In the course of time, his sadhana bore fruit. God appeared in front of this tapasvi and said, “Ask me for anything. I will give it to you.” The tapasvi smiled, laughed and said, “The purpose of my austerity was to have a glimpse of you. I have nothing to ask. If I had anything to ask, it was for your darshan. Now I don’t have anything to ask.”

God said, “No, I insist. You have to ask for something.” The tapasvi replied, “I have nothing to ask.” God said, “I am bound by my word. Therefore, you have to ask something, no matter what, and I will give it to you.” The tapasvi was furious, “I have nothing to ask, yet you keep pestering me. I am going to walk off.” He turned his back to God and walked away. God thought, ‘Never before in my life have I met anyone like this tapasvi. What to do?’

Suddenly, God saw the shadow of the tapasvi’s body and blessed the shadow and disappeared. The tapasvi did not know anything. He continued to walk, yet the shadow endowed with the grace of God worked miracles behind his back. The shadow fell on a dead tree and the tree became green and full of flowers. The shadow fell on a sick body and the sick body was cured. The shadow fell on a dead body and the dead body came to life. The tapasvi did not know anything because it was all happening behind his back. This is a story of how purushartha is important and grace is secondary. If purushartha is correct, grace will be there whether you like it or not

Sadhanatmaka

On the yogic journey there are two approaches. One is the sadhanatmak approach and one is the expressive approach. In the sadhanatmak approach you learn and you perfect. You go through the sequence of the yogas, sometimes practising asanas, sometimes pranayamas, pratyahara, kundalini, kriya, mantra japa. You put yourself through that process of sadhana to become a human being. Right now you are semi-humans or you are spirits in a human body.

We are spirits in a human body, we are not human beings, for in our body there are many mischievous traits. There are many smugglers living in the body: *kama*, *krodha* and *lobha*, passion, anger and greed, are the three main leaders of the smuggling group. What do they smuggle? They smuggle the jewel of wisdom. The humanness of life manifests with the cultivation of the positive sattwic faculties. Until and unless this happens, we are spirits in a human body, whiling away time, sometimes crying for we do not have enough, and sometimes crying because we have too much. There is no balance.

In the sadhanatmak yoga, you train yourself to manage your *indriyas*, the senses, the mind, *manas*, the intellect, *buddhi*, the memories, the impressions, *chitta*, the ego and the place of ego, *ahamkara*. After the negative traits of ahamkara have been subdued, you go into the expressive mode of yoga.

Atmabhava

I believe that two people in the world have contributed immensely to realizing yoga and the purpose of yoga. One was Patanjali, who described the sadhanatmak approach to yoga, the sequential approach to yoga. Then, after a gap of many hundreds of years, Swami Sivananda took the philosophy of yoga one step beyond Patanjali. Patanjali confined himself to the *sadhanatmak*, the practical aspect, and Swami Sivananda brought in the component of *vyavaharatmak*, the applied, expressive aspect.

Just as there are eight limbs of yoga according to Patanjali, there are eight limbs of yoga according to Swami Sivananda. And Sivananda yoga begins where Patanjali yoga stops. You go

through the practice and perfection of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana and get established in the state of dhyana. When you are established in the meditative state, when you have acquired wisdom and that wisdom has become stable, *sthitaprajna*, then you may live your life like a normal person, but your intentions and motivations, the direction of the flow of your energies have changed. Previously they were selfish, now they have become selfless; previously they were self-oriented and self-centred, now they have become universal and expansive. Previously you would only think of your own pleasure and happiness, now you begin to think of the pleasure and happiness of others. The eight-fold path of Sivananda yoga is: serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize.

After dhyana and samadhi, an expression of the balanced and harmonious nature is seen in service. What is service? It is involving oneself with *karma*, action, but there is a difference. Initially, karmas were performed to satisfy your own self, now they are intended to help uplift another person. Initially there was expectation in the service provided by you, now there is no expectation, only *kartavya*, inherent duty. Previously you would serve those you considered your own, now your actions reach out to everyone – that is atmabhava. Meditation has to give birth to atmabhava.

Atmabhava is the ability to see oneself reflected in another person. You see your reflection in your offspring and are connected with him, sympathize with him, love him and believe that the child is yours because it is born of your womb. You are able to see a reflection of the nature of your soul in that child. However, when you are able to see your own reflection in everyone, that is called atmabhava. And service happens most efficiently when there is atmabhava.

There was an incident in Swami Sivananda's life. One day a pilgrim on his way to Badrinath came to him. In those days there were no roads or cars, only bullock-carts and one's two legs. The pilgrim was sick. He came to Swami Sivananda's dispensary, described his problem and Sivanandaji gave him some medicine. The pilgrim went on his way. Three hours

later, Swami Sivananda felt that the medicine was not the appropriate one, a better one could have been given instead. He called Swami Satyananda and said, "Locate that pilgrim and give him this medicine because it is the right one. I have given him the wrong medicine."

This is a story of atmabhava. It was not necessary for Swami Sivananda to go through this motion of over-compassion. If you were the doctor, what would you have done? Nothing. But not Swami Sivananda. He did not ignore the suffering of any individual or his own responsibility, his commitment, dharma or kartavya. That was because he was able to see the divine presence in everyone.

Who will go through such pains to provide this kind of service today? Nobody. However, service is the only way God has given to ensure that others are helped. Service means co-operation. In nature everything exists for others. The human being is the only creature who lives for himself alone. And this selfish, self-centred human being wants to achieve the divine and the transcendental without any effort. Until and unless we are convinced and have the strength of character to walk the path, we will not be able to achieve anything.

Service is the first expression of Sivananda yoga after having come to the state of meditation and atmabhava. As you serve more and more, as you connect yourself with people more and more, you purify yourself internally and an unconditioned love emanates from your being touching everyone. The love of an enlightened being is universal and unconditional. Just as the rays of the sun shine equally on all, the love that radiates from the personality of an enlightened being embraces all.

The Nature of Mantra

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Mantras were discovered in higher states of meditation, when yogis started to explore the different layers of the mind to discover the source of existence. As they went deeper into their own nature, they started seeing themselves in a different way. We see ourselves as composed of matter, we identify with the body. But within this *sthoola*, gross body, there is also the *sukshma*, subtle body. The extensions of the subtle body are buddhi, chitta and ahamkara through which we are able to experience the attributes of the mind and interact with the world of sense objects. The subtle body is made up of the *manah chatushtah*, the four forms of the greater mind, the cosmic mind, manas, buddhi, chitta, ahamkara. Underneath the subtle body is the *karana sharira*, the causal body, the dimension of the spirit.

Inner awakening

Normally, it is hard to go beyond the sthoola, the sensorial or physical level in meditation. With some effort we can go up to sukshma, the chitta dimension, the ahamkara experience, the mental and intellectual level, and contain the agitation of the vrittis. A few are able to access the *karana sharira*, the dimension of spirit. Yogis who have gone to that level have experienced luminosity, the nature of existence, the eternal quality of the spirit. Therefore, they see their body as not composed of flesh, blood and marrow, but as a body of light. That light is identified with cosmic or divine luminosity, the

godly nature. In Samkhya philosophy, this experience is called *prakashsheelatva*, nature of luminosity.

In the state of luminosity, vibrations are heard that the physical body is incapable of hearing. Normally, we hear sounds only within a certain range of decibels; beyond or below that range the frequencies change and we cannot hear them. However, as we sensitize ourselves by experiencing and living in the causal body, we begin to hear and see many things. What we hear are mantras, what we see are yantras. We begin to see the circuits of life, how we are connected and are part of the unified field theory.

If we prick ourselves with a needle, where do we feel the prick? In the mind, brain, senses, in a particular part of the body? We feel the prick all over, because the mind experiences that prick, the brain, nerves, muscles, the *annamaya sharira*, the physical body, and the *manomaya sharira*, the mental body, respond to that sensation or stimulation. Every attribute of the gross and the subtle bodies respond to that one stimulation. When we transcend this level, then in the *jyoti sharira*, the astral, the causal level, we see the circuits. When we connect the dots of the circuits, we see the image of a yantra, because the image of the yantra is only a reflection of our mental strings, the jigsaw puzzle of the mind. Just as in a jigsaw puzzle there are different pieces that make a whole picture, the mind too has different parts that are separate yet fit in and interlock with each other to give the experience of the whole consciousness. One part may be memory, others arrogance, innocence, purity, *tamas*, *rajas*, *sattwa*. These are *pratyayas*, which make up the consciousness.

Mantras and chakras

In the state where the yogis experience the whole consciousness, they also hear sounds. The sound is heard in different ranges of frequencies, and they become mantras and *aksharas*. In kundalini yoga, each petal on the image of a chakra has an *akshara*, a letter, which is the sound or vibratory frequency belonging to that particular chakra. These are the subtle sounds that yogis hear. Having heard these sounds or mantras,

when they go back within, they hear the primordial sound – the pranava, *Om*.

The mantras that the yogis discovered are frequencies, amplitudes, ranges of energy that vibrate at each dimension of our personality. They started to combine the mantras. They identified each sound with a particular psychic centre. The bija mantra *Om*, for example, was identified as the sound of ajna chakra, the bija mantra *Ham* as the sound of vishuddhi chakra, the bija mantra *Yam* as the sound of anahata chakra, the bija mantra *Ram* as the sound of manipura chakra. Another range of frequencies was identified; these were sounds such as a, aa, e, ee, u, uu, a, ai, o, ou, am, aha. They make up the entire range of the bija mantras of the chakra system.

The yogis also perceived in their state of observation that by chanting a particular sound you are able to stimulate the chakras. If, for example, a long rope is tied to a tree trunk and you shake it, you will see the effect, the wave travels from one end of the rope to the other. Similarly, if the sound of a frequency is audibly spoken, the ripples of the vibration reach, activate and touch the psychic centre. So, in order to create a particular state of consciousness the yogis combined the sounds, and thus emerged mantras like *Om Namaha Shivaya*, *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, and others. Mantras became part of spiritual sadhana to awaken different areas of consciousness, to develop knowledge and creativity in a particular pratyaya or puzzle-piece of the consciousness.

Mantras and religion

When identification with a belief system emerged in the form of religion, and organized patterns of morality and practices were established to achieve one aim, then the mantras were identified by laypersons – not by yogis but by laypersons – as part of their religious practice. Mantras were used to identify with the symbols of worship that they were using. That was how mantras became associated with symbols.

People started to think that *Om Ramayah Namah* is a Rama mantra, Rama being the historical, mythological personality

who lived at a certain time and place. Mantras started to be associated with people's beliefs and understanding. Krishna mantras became associated with Krishna, Shiva mantras with Shiva, Devi mantras with Devi. However, mantras precede such identification with belief systems, and the classical and committed yogic traditions have remained true to the original purpose of the mantra, which is inner awakening. If you were to ask a classical yoga propagator the meaning of a mantra, the person would not be able to answer, as it is not possible to tell the meaning of a vibration.

Different uses of mantra

The yogis noticed that mantras were beneficial for managing the obsessive quality of the mind, the quality of *chinta*, worry or brooding, which limits one's potentials and creativity. The practice of mantra helps the mind come out of this state. In fact, even in the most stressful situation or environment it is possible to become relaxed with the use of the mantra.

It was also found that specific mantras activated certain centres of the brain, certain points of the mind and consciousness. These mantras were incorporated within social practices. For example, the Gayatri mantra is taught to young students in the Indian tradition so they may attain maturity of intelligence. Therefore, mantras had religious, spiritual and social roles.

Guru mantra

Mantras also create a link between two people: the guru and the disciple. In the development of spiritual awareness, mantra sadhana is the first initiation. The disciple accepts the guru as the master with an understanding that in the realm of spirituality he or she is a novice. So they surrender themselves to acquire wisdom, understanding and experience through the guidance of the guru. The mantra given by the guru becomes the link to intensify this feeling; it connects one with one's inner strength.

The mantra sadhana received from the guru is considered final because you are not using your ego, *ahamkara*, with the guru; you are using your sentiments, feelings, heart and

emotions. When you go to school and learn from a teacher, you take his word as final and imbibe the teachings, and at the time of the exam use all your faculties to express what you have imbibed. The same principle applies with the guru, but not at the intellectual level; at the heart level. You place your trust in the guru just as the student places trust in the professor. The mantra becomes the link between the guru and the disciple; it is the final link and the only link. The mantra initiation is the main initiation, and the guru mantra is the first and last.

Nevertheless, when you receive the guru mantra you do not need to leave any practices that you have already been following, whether going to Sunday church, reading the Koran or *Guru Granth Sahib*, or worshipping a number of gods and goddesses. At the end of whatever you do, practise the guru mantra. The guru mantra does not change your belief system; rather it opens up a new avenue for you to express yourself in that belief. So, at the end of your rituals and routines, practise the guru mantra in the form of meditation. Practise it not as ritual, but as meditation.

Practising the mantra

Mantra practice is a sadhana. If we practise two malas with absolute concentration, it will give the result of a thousand malas practised without concentration. Don't think that if we practise 10 malas today or 15 malas tomorrow, our spiritual growth will be faster. If taking one aspirin relieves us of a headache in ten minutes, will taking ten aspirins make it go away in a minute? Whether we practise two malas or 2000 malas a day, the time taken to achieve spiritual growth will be the same. Therefore, it is better that we do less with more intensity and concentration than more while fighting with the mind, not concentrating and not being able to experience the internalization of the meditative process. Ten minutes of mantra practice with the mala is enough – no more, no less.

Also, do not identify with the experience of meditation. Do not condition yourself to think about the effect of the meditation. Just as we enjoy a good meal, we should enjoy the meditation too. If we don't enjoy the meditation on a certain

day, we can think that it is a day of fasting, but don't discontinue the practice. Whether we see light, energy, demons or hell, we must remember that these are only projections of the mind. Observe and accept them, and after coming out of meditation forget what you experienced and go about your life normally. This will bring about a balance in your spiritual life.

Since we are not used to internalizing, ten minutes of internalization has to be balanced with at least fifty minutes of activity – externalization. This is the *sutra*, thread, that one has to follow in yoga. Those who meditate eight hours a day in their zeal acquire nothing but lower back pain. The sadhana has to be short and sweet, something that we can do quickly and derive maximum benefit from. This is the meditative practice of mantra.

The other method of mantra practice is the simple way. Continue to repeat the mantra mentally when you are walking, sitting, eating, stressed, distressed, watching television, reading the newspaper. You can go on repeating the mantra mentally, for a minute or 24 hours, while continuing with normal activities. The only restriction is, do not practise mantra while driving.

Overcoming drowsiness

Often, when we begin to meditate on the mantra and the mind is internalized, sleep comes. We feel sleepy because the mind has nothing to hold on to. We remain awake because there are many things the mind and the senses can hold on to. The moment we begin to withdraw the senses in the state of introversion, sleep comes.

When you notice that you are beginning to feel sleepy or losing touch with the ground reality, switch from mental repetition to whispering the mantra. With the movement of the lips, the attention comes back to the mantra and we become alert for a little longer. When we have become alert, we can go back to mental repetition. If the sleepiness persists, say the mantra aloud. The mind will connect with the sound and come awake. When you are fully up, go back to mental repetition, *manasic japa*.

Using the mala

The mala used during mantra practice acts as an anchor for the mind. If a bird is flying over the ocean searching for land, it may use a piece of driftwood to rest upon until it finds land. The mala serves the same purpose for the mind as the piece of wood for the bird. It is an anchor. Just as whispered, vocalized and mental repetitions are used to stay with the practice, the mala too is used to stay focused. The movement of the mala keeps track of time and the numbers of repetition. The movement also holds your mind, and does not allow it to slip. So, a mala should always be used during mantra sadhana.

There are five different kinds of malas accepted in the yogic tradition – tulsi, rudraksha, rakta-chandan (red sandalwood), shveta chandan (white sandalwood), and crystal. Traditionally, it is believed that Vaishnavas use tulsi, Shaivas use rudraksha and Shaktas use crystal. But this is a religious belief; a spiritual aspirant can use any kind of mala to attain different states.

The sadhana begins with the tulsi mala. Tulsi represents purity, *shuddhata*, *pavitrata*. It is a healing energy, the mother of physicians and medicine. If we are able to evoke the sentiment of purity while using the tulsi mala, then the vibration of tulsi will also help us attain that purity. During mantra initiation a tulsi mala is given because attainment of purity is the first step of spiritual life. The white dhoti given during initiation should also be worn during mantra sadhana. It will remind you that you are enveloped in purity, simplicity, innocence, free from the crooked traits of the intellect, desires and expectations. Whenever we wear an external identity during sadhana, it will remind us of what we have to achieve and aspire for.

In jignasu initiation, a 27-bead rudraksha mala is given, which you can wear while practising the sadhana and not necessarily twenty-four hours of the day. When you wear rudraksha, think about bringing a balance in your life and developing intuitive abilities, the third eye. Think about awakening the auspicious energy so that your life can be touched by the grace of divinity. Each mala has a different

sentiment associated with it, but guru mantra sadhana is to be done with a tulsi mala unless otherwise specified.

Breath and mantra

We can also combine the breath with mantra during japa. For example, with each inhalation we say the mantra once, and with each exhalation once more. Another method is to remain silent during the inhalation and say the mantra during exhalation. If the mantra is long, we can divide it up into two parts: half during inhalation, half during exhalation.

You can find your own pace and method to practise the mantra with the breath. Also, there are no restrictions on the time for mantra practice. Some women tend to think that they have become impure during their menstrual period and should not practise the mantra. This should not be the case. Practise the mantra as much as you like, as it is an expression of your faith and devotion, and a commitment to yourself.

Mantra and ishta

It is possible that some people may receive a mantra which does not correspond to their *ishta devata*, titular deity. If the mantra is given to a child, it will not matter because he or she will not employ the intellect. But for a person whose intellect is awakened and who belongs to a belief system, this becomes a problem. They will associate the mantra with their belief system, knowing fully well that the real spirit is formless.

Therefore, the symbol given to every initiate on which to focus the concentration while practising the mantra is the same: jyoti, flame of light. Think of the jyoti and allow any image to appear in the jyoti. The image will change of its own accord, and that is the purpose of the symbol. Instead of the ishta devata or our association, we focus on the jyoti because it is both *sakara*, having a form, and *nirakara*, formless, both. Luminosity is the nature of the inner spirit. In our *pooja*, ritualistic practice, we can stick to our ishta. In mantra sadhana, focus on the jyoti and allow the *pratika*, image, to take the form of the ishta that it desires. Use the mantra as a tool to awaken this particular quality in yourself.

Diksha

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Diksha means to see, to acquire sight. The word diksha comes from the Sanskrit root *drik*, to see. What you call initiation is actually acquiring the ability to see the unknown dimensions of your own self. Diksha is not an initiation into a club or a tradition, diksha is an aspiration that is cultivated within yourself to realize the inner you.

Mantra diksha

The first step is mantra diksha, as the mantra allows you to internalize the dissipated, distracted external perceptions. You have all the force and power of the universe which at present is flowing outwards: emotions, feelings, sentiments, thoughts, aspirations, expectations, desires are outgoing. The expressions of life are moving out from the centre of the individual into the material world. When you want to have spiritual realization, the energy and awareness which is being directed outwards has to be diverted inwards. That is all.

Paramhamsaji says that emotions are like a crystal ball, with no colour in it. That emotion takes a colour when it comes in contact with a sense object. When you place a clear crystal on a red coloured cloth, you will see the red reflected in the crystal ball. You place that crystal on any colour, and you will see that colour inside. You place the crystal on a clear object or substance like water, you will not see any colour reflected.

In the same manner, when feelings come in contact with a sense object, they take on the colour of the sense object.

The relationship between parent and child evokes the feeling of affection. If you see a pile of money lying unclaimed, the association will give birth to greed. You talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend, the emotion will be in the form of passion. Whenever an emotion comes in contact with another sense object, it takes on a colour which is identified as an expression of mind. Passion, greed, anger, avarice, hatred, jealousy, love, compassion, sympathy, dryness, aloofness, softness, closeness are responses of your mind in different situations. This same energy of emotions which at present is directing the entire human perception outwards, has to be diverted, channelled inwards. When it is channelled inwards, it takes the form of *shraddha*, faith, *vishwas*, confidence, and also clarity of mind, awareness, concentration, meditation.

In this altered state of perception, you experience the subtle quality and nature that governs your life. Mantra is an aid. Use the mantra as a tool to internalize, contain and re-channel the outward flowing energies, and to divert them for inner development, acquiring inner wisdom and inner vision, through which you are able to monitor, modify and manage your own subtle behaviours and responses. Mantra diksha is taken for this purpose in yoga, not to bring you closer to God but to provide you with the ability and vision to realize the unknown dimensions of yourself.

The meaning of mantra is the power which liberates you from the obsessive nature and quality of the mind – *mananat trayate iti mantrah*. A thought comes in your mind, you cannot free yourself from that thought. Worry, suffering, pleasure, pain, happiness, whenever any state is experienced you are completely caught up in that state. You brood about it, you think about it, you want it, you desire it, you reject it, you deplore it, you eulogize it. A bad thought takes root in the mind, and you continuously think about it during the day. This is an obsessive nature. If you believe what everybody tells you then you have no life of your own.

There is a story. One young man, his elderly father, and one strong horse were travelling together. While they were travelling people commented, “Look at the idiotic nature

of these two. They have such a strong horse, why don't they ride the horse and go to their destination faster." The two heard and thought, "Yes they are right." They both got on the horse. A little ahead, some other people said, "Look at these two. Two people sitting on a horse." The son said, "I will get down and walk." A little ahead some said, "Look at this soft body of a young man – he is made to walk, while the strong and elderly man is sitting happily on the horse." So the father said, "I will come down, my son."

The human mind and human nature is so weak that if somebody says something you believe it, ignoring your own experience and wisdom. You are influenced by events, people, circumstances. This weakness of the mind is the restricting factor in the growth of human creativity. When you use the mantra, suddenly new avenues of expression open up naturally. You feel that you have an inner support and strength, which you can use to help yourself and others along the path. This is the process and practice of mantra diksha.

Try to be regular in the practice of mantra. The mantra practice is discontinued because you are lazy, or you feel you do not have time as your routine is hectic, or you forget about it. These are some reasons why you discontinue with the mantra. If you are unable to face such tendencies of the mind which are your own creation, then I do not see much hope as the mantra becomes subject to your desires and whims. Today you feel like doing twenty malas, tomorrow you don't feel like doing it so you will make an excuse. You are facing the infirmity of your own mind when things like this happen. Try not to miss a single day, just as you would not like to miss your lunch or dinner. No matter what important thing you are doing, you will leave that thing to have your meal because it is a necessity, it is a need. No matter what important thing you are doing you will find an excuse to go to the bathroom as it is a necessity and a need. In the same manner, mantra sadhana has to become a necessity and a need for it to become beneficial in your life. Therefore, make the effort to practise your mantra regularly.

Lifestyle initiation

After some time of mantra practice and perfecting the process of mantra, you move into another level of initiation which is lifestyle initiation. This is more for people who wish to dedicate some of their time and creativity to help others. Lifestyle diksha has to be understood as sannyasa diksha, not as a form of renunciation but as a method by which you can imbibe the qualities of sannyasins in your normal life.

Sannyasa means that you work to discover the peace within yourself and you work to propagate that peace in your environment, to society. *Nyasa* means trust, *sam* means total. You use the creative abilities of your life by placing them in a trust to help uplift yourself and fellow human beings. In the fulfilment of sannyasa you can take many directions. One direction is that of renunciation, another direction is observation of your own karmas and trying to make yourself free from the effects of the karmas. Another direction of living sannyasa is just imbibing the spirit of service. Whether you have the qualification or you do not, it does not matter. You imbibe the qualities to serve and to love. Another direction of sannyasa is sadhana, if the facilities are provided, involve yourself in sadhana. Sannyasa can go in many directions – renunciation, sadhana, service, swadhyaya, tapasya, and you still remain a sannyasin.

In your normal household life, you can also live with the attitude of a sannyasin. What is the attitude of a sannyasin? What effort does a sannyasin make to achieve and discover perfection inside? The first effort of a sannyasin is to extract the plug from the socket of materialism and to put the plug of your personality into the socket of the spiritual nature. When you extract the plug from one socket, there is separation, disconnection, *vairagya*. When you connect the plug to another socket, there is union, coming together, merging. This is the main sadhana of lifestyle, no matter what you do, what profession you follow, what denomination or creed you belong to. For the experience of inner peace, you have to take certain steps which are common to everyone, for it is a charted path.

Jignasu and karma sannyasa

The first stage of lifestyle diksha or initiation, is the *jignasu*, the enquirer. The sadhana of a *jignasu* is trying to modify a lifestyle. Take four pages and make a list. On one page write your abilities and strengths, on another page your weaknesses and shortcomings, on another page your ambitions and desires, and on the fourth page your actual needs, which are not your ambitions and desires. Keep these four pages, look at them again and again until you are satisfied that you have observed yourself to the best of your ability. The strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs reflect your nature and character. Each month, pick up one shortcoming or weakness to overcome and pick up one strength or quality to cultivate more. Pick up one need to fulfil and pick up one ambition to modify. This is the sadhana of a *jignasu*.

Through this analysis of your character you come to know the subtle influences that shape these expressions in life in the form of strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. With this observation *viveka*, the discriminative ability, comes into play. The modification to improve the quality of life begins on this journey of lifestyle initiation of *jignasu sannyasa*.

After some time, when you feel that you are aware of yourself, you move into the next level, that of *karma sannyasa*. The sadhana of a *karma sannyasin* living in society with family and profession, facing struggles, is to become an observer of your participation, involvement and interaction in life. When you become aware of interaction, involvement and participation in life, and your responses to different moments, you make the effort to remain balanced and equipoised. You make the effort to detach yourself from your association with expectations, sentiment, feeling, idea. You adopt the attitude of 'Let Thy will be done'.

Once the gopis asked Krishna, "Who is your beloved?" They were hoping for the answer that Krishna would say, Radha, or you or anybody. Krishna said, "My beloved is my flute." Everybody was taken aback, thinking, how could that be? He said, "My flute is hollow inside, there is no obstruction. When the bamboo is hollow then any melody can be played

by the musician. Therefore, the flute is my beloved for I play the music that I want to play.”

This is what you have to try to achieve: become free from expectations and desires. Do not reject or renounce them – if it happens, fine, if it doesn’t fine. The attitude has to be: let Thy will be done. I am only an instrument of Thy peace. A harmonium has the potential to play any kind of music yet by itself it cannot play, someone else has to play it and bring out the harmony of the harmonium. In the same manner, you have a complex and beautiful orchestra group inside you waiting to be played, yet you do not know how. You cannot play because there are too many obstacles on the path.

Through observation of the karmas and by gradually detaching yourself from the expectations, you complete the sadhana of a karma sannyasin. Not by negating the *kartavya*, the duty which you have to follow, but by observing how your expectations have attached themselves to your efforts in life and whether they lead you towards happiness or suffering. That is the sadhana of a karma sannyasin.

The third aspect of the lifestyle is poorna sannysa, which is a way of life when the positive qualities of life come to the front. It is a life committed to sacrifice. It is a life committed to the death of the gross nature. All initiations aspire to give you the ability to discover the unknown dimension of your own nature, to take you closer to the source of strength and transcendence within you which is the sadhana. The process and effort you make to realize this inner you, the inner nature, the cosmic nature inside, is known as sadhana.

Bhakti Yoga

25 February 2007, Satya Sai Auditorium,
Koramangala, Bangalore

You have learned the subject of yoga not as a practice to be performed for one hour every day, but for it to become part of your lifestyle so you can go through the transformation that yoga provides, to experience the higher creative qualities of life. You have seen the various major components of yoga which can help you establish yourself in spiritual life. To have success in spiritual life, it is important to balance the material area first. It is important that you begin to observe, analyze and manage your immediate environment by changing your attitudes and mentality and fine-tuning your personality, behaviour and expression.

Fine-tuning

As you develop the faculty of observation you acquire the quality of the *drashta*, the witness. Then the fine-tuning of the body and prana begins. The first requirement is to prepare the mental ground. The second is to ensure that the energy flows through the body in an unhampered manner. With the third you acquire a concentrated state of mind. When the mental energy focuses on one point, it creates the sankalpa state. The focused mind is filled with sankalpa shakti, which is used in meditation to access the unknown dimension of our consciousness.

You have to conceive of consciousness in the form of a jigsaw puzzle. A jigsaw puzzle breaks an image down into many different pieces, and to see the image you have to

put the jigsaw puzzles pieces together. Each puzzle piece represents a part of the image, a part of the photograph without which the photograph is incomplete. In the same manner, our consciousness is like a jigsaw puzzle: one part of that consciousness is thought, one piece emotion, third piece *buddhi*, rationality, fourth piece a particular kind of behaviour, it can be anything. Like this all your behaviours and expressions of mind and senses are pieces of the jigsaw puzzle called consciousness.

You do not have the ability yet to put all the pieces together and see the entire consciousness. In meditation the placement of this jigsaw puzzle happens, and when you are able to perceive your consciousness as it really is, it is the meditative, creative state. From this meditative and creative state, you move into the expressive dimension of yoga, the yoga of Swami Sivananda.

The ultimate yoga

The sadhana approach to yoga is the yoga of Patanjali – managing the mind, the intelligence, the buddhi, the chitta and the ahamkara principle – the subtle forces which are the pillars of your personality. After that the yoga of Swami Sivananda comes into force: you are able to express what you have attained creatively and practically in life.

I want to tell you about another yoga which may not seem like an important yoga yet it is the ultimate yoga. Kundalini yoga, kriya yoga or whatever other yogas are not the ultimate for they represent practices which you need to perfect. In bhakti yoga, you do not need to practise anything, you need to inculcate and cultivate a quality. Many people have spoken on this yoga, yet somehow this yoga has completely slipped from the mind of yogic aspirants or has taken on a different garb. Bhakti yoga is the last yoga you need to practise in your life, even after your kundalini has awakened, and you have had fantastic experiences of the psychic dimensions in your life. It is the final yoga which brings the last transformation in your life, as it breaks down the barrier of individuality. There is a statement by Kabirdas:

*Jal mein kumbh, kumbh meing jal hai, bahar bhitari pani
Phuthi kumbh jal hi samana, baat kahe yeh gyaani.*

When an earthen pot is submerged in a lake there is water inside the earthen pot and surrounding it. The earthen pot is the barrier between the two waters and does not allow them to mix or merge. If you want to merge the water contained in the earthen pot with the water surrounding it, what do you do? You break the barrier, the shape, the wall, the pot. This is the final breaking that one experiences in life before moksha, when the last vestige of the negative traits of human nature are dropped.

This path is known as the nine-fold path of yoga, *navangha yoga*, the yoga with nine limbs. It is bhakti yoga, for bhakti does not mean devotion, worship, adoration or ritual. *Bhakti* is a pure state of feeling and emotion within you which experiences the higher cosmic quality, and which is connected to that cosmic quality and nature. The connection with that cosmic quality makes the personality one hundred percent positive and creative.

Satsang – *prathama bhagati santana kar sangaa* (Aranyakand, before doha 35)

Satsang is the first stage of bhakti yoga. In the *Ramacharitamana*s the teaching Sri Rama gives mother Shabari is bhakti yoga. In raja yoga you rectified the imbalances of the head. With bhakti yoga you have to rectify the imbalances of the heart, remove the clogged arteries and conduct bypass surgery. When the arteries of the heart become clogged, the negative tendencies in human beings come up. The flow of *bhavana*, feeling, in the heart is blocked. Just as a surgeon has to perform a bypass surgery, a guru has to perform bypass surgery of the heart so that you are able to overcome the block in bhavana. Bhavana is pure, raw energy.

Emotion means energy in motion. It is something that you cannot manage, guide, control, direct. You have had the experience of that. Are you able to witness your fear? Are you able to witness your insecurity? Are you able to witness your worry? Are you able to witness the different experiences that

arise from the mind and senses? No. It is difficult. The first stage of bhakti yoga according to the *Ramcharitamanas* is *santana kar sangaa*, to be in the association of the pious. Piousness is a quality of mind that you can acquire, and with which you are able to remove the mask that you put on yourself and your face to improve your self-image. That is known as satsang.

Satsang does not mean discourse. If you are in the company of truth you have to imbibe truth, otherwise what is the use of listening to something and not being able to put it into practice? If you realize the truth yet are unable to put truth into practice, it has no meaning. So being in the association of the pious, the truthful does not mean spiritual discourse as nothing enters your thick skin.

One day a businessman comes to a satsang of a spiritual teacher. He enjoys the discourse, goes back home and tells his son he should come and listen to an interesting talk. The next day this man comes, listens to the discourse, goes home and says to his son, tomorrow he should definitely come.

The third day, the son, to please the father, wants to go. He asks his father, "What will happen if I go there." The father says, "You will learn many things, get many good samskaras, and receive spiritual education." So they both go and listen to the discourse of the third day.

When they come back home, the son says to the father, "Father, the Swamiji did speak nice things, and I enjoyed it. But you know, nobody carried anything back with them." The father says, "What do you mean?" The son replied, "When the people in the auditorium got up to leave, they all dusted their body." The vestige of knowledge which they had received they dusted off and then left, so nobody received anything.

This is a true story; you go to satsangs, you are in association of the good to which you are attracted, however, that association only remains intellectual and the dust does not settle. There is no acceptance and no understanding.

The association of satya, the association of the pious, means that you develop an approach, a mentality, a thought pattern which connects you with the positives in life. For that you have to be open from all sides and angles, not only your

ears to listen to good words, not only the tongue which praises the good word.

Satsang is part of swadhyaya in bhakti yoga for without knowing, understanding, experiencing, you cannot know satsang. Satsang also denotes connection of the heart not connection of the mind. Connection of the mind is discussion and connection of the heart is satsang, where you accept the truth and you acquire the ability to know the truth, and that is the first stage of bhakti yoga.

Be positive – *doosari rati mama kathaa prasangaa* (Aranyakand, before doha 25)

The second component is to always maintain positive attitudes and thoughts. Be inspired by stories, *katha*, from the lives of divine heroes. Always believe that you have the strength to move mountains if need be. Do not see yourself as a weak, negative, destructive person. Have a smile on your lips and a glitter in your eyes with positive thoughts in the mind. To be happy, content and maintain positive thoughts is difficult, for the mind is affected by the karmas, which are of three types: *isht*, *anisht* and *nishrit*.

Isht karma means a desired, a satisfying fulfilling karma, a cherished action; something you really want to do and which gives a desired result. *Anisht karma* is the detrimental, destructive action which does not give good results. *Mishrit karma* is good and bad, both are contained in it. When the mind is subject to the influence of the karmas, then how can it maintain its positivity? The fault of the indriyas can be seen at some point, somewhere, sometime, and therefore the second component of bhakti yoga is to maintain positivity in life at all times without forcing yourself. It is a difficult sadhana, for this positivity has to become your swabhava.

Humility – *amaan guru pada pankahja seva teesari bhagati* (Aranyakand, before doha 35)

The third component of bhakti yoga is to identify with humility, egolessness, and follow the guidelines given to you by the guru. It is another difficult condition, how to cultivate

humility, how to become egoless? The ego can manifest in any form even to a person who has had the God experience. Ego can create havoc even in that person's life.

There were two friends who were doing a lot of tapasya with the hope that one day they would have the vision of the divine. They were neighbours and close friends. They started doing their tapasya, their sadhana in their respective homes. At the culmination of their sadhana, God appeared to sadhaka number one and said, "I am pleased with you, what can I do for you?" Sadhaka number one said, "Thank you, just give me peace of mind." God said, "I grant you that boon," and goes to the house of sadhaka number two.

Sadhaka number two begins to think, 'God went to that house first, that means he thinks the other man is more important than me. If God considered me to be important he would have come here first. Why did he go to the other man?' In the heart of hearts, he became jealous and decided to take revenge. When God asked him what he wanted, he said, "If you are happy with me, grant me that whatever I ask for my neighbour should get double of it." God was surprised.

He said, "You are the first person to say 'whatever I ask, my neighbour should get twice that amount'. So if I give you one million gold coins, your neighbour is going to get two million." The sadhaka said, "Yes, that is exactly my wish." God was happy with the selfless attitude of sadhaka number two. Little did he know the bad intention that was lurking in the depths of the mind of sadhaka number two. God granted the boon and disappeared. Sadhaka number two is happy and says, "Make me blind in one eye." He loses one eye but the poor neighbour loses both eyes. Sadhaka number two again says, "Make me lame in one leg," and sadhaka number one loses the use of both legs.

Sadhaka number two again says, "Let there be a well in front of my door." Two wells appear, one at the front door and the second at the back door of sadhaka number one. In this manner, sadhaka number two made the life miserable for sadhaka number one. He practically destroyed the life even

after having had darshan in which you are supposed to feel, experience and connect with the purity of yourself.

Of course this story is an extreme example, yet things like this do happen. The positivity of mind cannot be maintained for long and other associations of mind sometimes raise their head. Therefore, it is said as the third stage or *anga* of bhakti yoga, that you become humble and in humility follow the guidelines given to you by the guru without deviation.

Mantra – *mantra jaapa mama dridha biswaasaa* (Aranyakand, before doha 35)

The fourth component of bhakti is mantra japa. If you analyze the different stages of bhakti yoga, they take you from the cultivation of your truthful nature and removing the mask that you put on due to your ego identity to the state when you experience oneness and union with the divine.

You go through a process of inner transformation in bhakti yoga: transformation of the heart. Paramahamsaji said clearly after he left Munger, “As long as I was in Munger I made the effort to bring yoga into the fold of science, remove yoga from the fold of mysticism and make it practical, concise and scientific. When I consider my own life I experimented with everything: with the intellect, with life, and I awakened the chakras and kundalini. The fulfilment in my life, however, I find through bhakti.”

Whenever the word bhakti is used you identify it with worship or a ritual process, a pooja. Whenever bhakti is used you identify this word in connection with God, your *ishta devata*, your chosen one. Bhakti is as complex and comprehensive as the system of raja yoga, where you are dealing with the layers of mind. In bhakti you are dealing with layers of feelings.

Although the common form of bhakti is *mantra japa*, repetition. The form of bhakti known to people is to show the deepak, do arati, chant stotras and mantras, do anushtana and aradhana. The real form of bhakti which leads to transformation of one's emotions, is not known to many. There is a psycho-emotional dimension to bhakti, not just

the ritualistic and devotional component. Raja yoga deals with the psychological states but only when you have worked through the heart, when you have activated the energy of the heart, does yoga becomes a reality in your life as a permanent experience and state of existence. This is not a negation of the material life rather it is an addition to the material life. You have to adopt a system in your life which allows you to incorporate the component of bhakti.

Mantra sadhana is the sadhana component of bhakti yet there is the jnana component of bhakti and the emotional component of bhakti, when you move into rituals, prayers as an expression of your inner faith, love and devotion.

Universal bhakti

One current of bhakti is to be able to express that inner faith, conviction and devotion; the other current is through channelling the mantra sadhana not as ritual but as a meditative process. The jnana component of bhakti is the observation and redirection of emotions, acquiring and attaining the purity of heart and emotions, cultivating a state in which benevolent qualities become predominant rather than the limiting qualities.

This is the teaching of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda – observed Swami Satyananda as the transformation, the change took place in his nature. At Ganga Darshan, Munger, he was as an exponent of yoga, a propagator of yoga and in Rikhia he is a bhakta. His bhakti is not ritualistic or religious, his bhakti is the universal bhakti. In this universal bhakti, the entire creation is embraced; in the personal bhakti you embrace an idol.

In the personal bhakti you embrace an idol, my ishta devata, my aradhya, but in the universal bhakti you embrace and accept the entire creation as the manifestation of divine luminosity, the divine spark. Bhakti changes from personal to universal – the rituals of bhakti represent the personal involvement and the meditative bhakti represents the shift from the personal to a more expansive understanding and connection with humanity.

From this meditative bhakti you move into the contemplative bhakti, which becomes the universal. Swami Sivananda inspired spiritual aspirants by telling them, 'Humanity is your God, and service to humanity is your worship to God'.

This is universal bhakti in which the spark of divinity can be seen in each and everything, not only within yourself. Even in the speck of dust you can experience infinity as you can see infinity contained in a grain of sand.

In this expression of bhakti, I see the breaking down of the barriers of self-centred or self-oriented awareness. Paramahamsaji many times asks a question: you have black ink and you have a cup filled with water. You put a drop of black ink in the water and the whole water in the cup becomes black. If you want to make that water crystal clear again, what do you do? You pour the cup of black water in a bucket of clear water and when that little quantity of water mixes and merges with the greater volume of water, it will take on the colour of the greater volume. It will still remain but invisible. It will become so dissolved that you will not even notice that it existed once upon a time.

Paramahamsaji says that the same thing applies to human attachments. You are attached to four people, but if you keep increasing the sphere of attachment from four to five to twenty to eighty, the blackness of personal attachment begins to dilute itself naturally. When you have extended your association with so many people that you are not really focused on something or someone as the only object of attention in your life, then you become free from attachments. To kill an attachment, increase the sphere of your attachment. As you increase the sphere of attachment bhakti becomes more powerful, for the bhakti attitude eventually plays a major role in the conversion of your self-centred mentality.

Jnana yoga, karma yoga or raja yoga cannot do that. Only bhakti yoga can do it. Therefore, bhakti yoga has been considered to be the highest yoga, not because it has a religious meaning or association, but because it helps to bring the final transformation in life which propels you to the next level of evolution.

Don't think of yoga as a physical or meditative practice, rather as a system of achieving inner transformation and developing the positive and benevolent force inside, which brings joy, fulfilment and contentment to life. Use the spark of yoga to light your path.

This is the message of yoga which I wanted to share with all of you and which is expressed in this song:

When the day is dark and dreary and the way is hard to find,
Don't let your heart be weary. Just keep this thought in mind:
It is better to light one little candle than to stumble in the dark.

Better to light one little candle, all you need is a tiny spark.
And if we all say a prayer that the world should be free.
What a wonderful dawn of a new world we'll see.
And if everyone lights one little candle what a bright world
this would be.

An invitation

Sri Swamiji is a sannyasin and he still maintains his identity as a sannyasin, not as a guru, not as a leader in yoga. Those labels do not mean anything. As a sannyasin, Paramahamsaji has taken a sankalpa for peace, plenty and prosperity in the life of everyone and he says this will be his sankalpa for all times to come. He says: "I am not looking for emancipation, enlightenment, moksha or God-realization. My sankalpa in life is to be able to wipe the tears of suffering from people's eyes, and I wish to return as quickly as I can. I am ready to take birth again and again as long as God wants me to. As long as I can wipe the tears from the eyes, I shall come back again."

This is a powerful sankalpa. Most sadhus go into samadhi; few sadhus say they want to come back to help other people come out of their misery. Few have said, 'I wish to be the last person to leave this planet after I have ensured that everyone has gone before me'.

When such a sadhu with such a will and character takes a sankalpa it comes true. Twelve years ago Paramahamsaji took the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity for everyone,

and to give a shape to this sankalpa he undertook the performance of Sat Chandi Mahayajna, the invocation to the Cosmic Mother, as the mother is always closer to the child than the father. The mother will always listen to your prayers, needs and demands and try to fulfil them; the father is a bit of a miser. Therefore, the invocation of the Cosmic Mother, Chandi. The Sat Chandi Mahayajna is the medium to bring this sankalpa to each and every one.

Along with the Sat Chandi Mahayajna we also conduct the Rajasooya Yajna which is performed by kings and emperors. Why is a sadhu performing this Rajasooya Yajna, which generally is performed by those who have won land, territory, nations and then came back with the loot distributing it to their people?

Kings are able to do the Rajasooya Yajna. A king is a person who conquers land, yet a king is also a person who conquers the hearts of people. A sannyasi does not conquer land and territory; he conquers the hearts of people and therefore he is the emperor of hearts. The emperor of hearts can definitely conduct a Rajasooya Yajna and share the spiritual booty.

The earning member of your family will keep earning and collecting. Whatever he collects is given to you and used for you. This is true in a sannyasin's life also. When sannyasins are given the opportunity, freedom and isolation to conduct their own sadhanas, they accumulate spiritual wealth. When the sannyasi meets with people the spiritual wealth is distributed in the form of wisdom, grace, shakti, inspiration, knowledge and realization. Once you acquire a part of that spiritual wealth, you become prosperous in life, in mind, thought, attitude – and material prosperity also comes.

During the Rajasooya Yajna, material and spiritual prosperity is distributed to all people who come. This being the last year of the sankalpa, do come to participate. It is a beautiful gathering of the positive intentions of life. Help comes from all corners of the world and people come forward for they are inspired by the inspiration and teaching of Swami Sivananda's and Swami Satyananda's message. I invite all of you to be a witness to that event, receive the grace and participate in the fulfilment of the sankalpa for peace, plenty and prosperity for everyone.

Discovering the Human Potential – Mind and Emotional Management

3 November 2007, Keynote Address at the World President's Organisation (WPO) University, Delhi

The topic which I have been given is developing the human potential and management of mind and emotions. My spiritual grandfather, Swami Sivananda, a yogi and the founder of our organization, used to say that a human being is an integrated expression of the qualities of head, heart, and hands. One cannot conceive a human being without a head, a heart or hands. We have to learn how to use the creativity of these three aspects to achieve peace and prosperity, and the entire subject of yoga is based on developing head, heart and hands and harnessing their energy and potential.

Today yoga is only seen as a physical practice yet in reality it is a lifestyle. It is a change in one's own perspective to life, from negative to positive, from restrictive to creative. That is the definition of yoga. Here is an example: you have a weighing scale, the old kind which you have to hold in your hand, putting the weights on one side and the items on the other side. If you put all the good qualities of your life on one side of the weighing scale and all the negative qualities on the other side of the weighing scale, which side will be heavier? You decide. When greed, envy, anger, hatred, jealousy, the negative expressions of life are on one side, and love, compassion, sympathy, caring are on the other side, which scale will be heavier? Suppose the negative side is heavier, then to improve the quality of your life, you have to put more weight on the positive side.

I do not believe in either mindfulness or mindlessness: mind is one entity, it is an energy, a force and a subtle power. Psychology defines consciousness as conscious, subconscious, unconscious and now as superconscious. However, the mind is a product of that consciousness which interacts with the world of senses and objects, and consciousness is behind it all. We use the mind which is in the forefront to survive in life – body, mind, emotions and the ability to perform are highlights of human life; they are the components which make up human life and this mind.

Relaxing the mind

This mind is continually under stress due to its association with the senses and sense objects. You try to find relaxation in order to ease the pressures of the mind. Entertainment is there to ease the pressure of the mind, to divert the attention of the mind from problems to something more enjoyable. Relaxation is there to lower the level of stress in the mind so that you can be more effective and creative in your performance and your activities.

It seems that the mind fluctuates between stress and relaxation: anxiety and entertainment are two major roles of the mind. Many techniques have come about to help us manage our mind, yet mind management begins with the ability to relax. We do not know how to relax, thinking that relaxation is lying down and sleeping. From the yogic perspective, relaxation is the diversion of the mind from its normal associations to some other level where it is self-contained and there are no distractions which pull the mind outwards. There is a good technique in yoga known as yoga nidra. It is a practice of relaxation in which you become aware of yourself, your body, the stresses and tensions within yourself, and you gradually release them.

After achieving relaxation, we move to the second level which is learning how to focus and concentrate. The concentration span of every individual is short. When this concentration span is increased it leads to the development of inner creativity. Relaxation is the first step in the management

of anxiety, stress, depression, elation. The second stage is focusing and developing attention or concentration. After you have developed the ability to focus and concentrate the mind, you naturally and spontaneously enter into a meditative state.

Meditation is not escaping from the influences of life, it is recognizing how they affect your behaviours, personality, nature and thought, and developing immunity from the detrimental influences to which you subject yourself day in and day out. From the time you wake up, so much input goes into your brain and mind which is not always positive.

What is the routine of a normal person? When you wake up in the morning, you first read the newspaper or listen to the news. What do you hear? The negative – this problem, that crisis. This is how you condition your mind from the beginning of the day, and the mind becomes distracted and dissipated. When you sleep at night you relax, no doubt, yet the first information that goes into that relaxed state of mind is of problem, crisis, tension. That is the conditioning which you live with throughout the day, unable to relax, find joy and peace in your own environment or within yourself. Therefore, the component of mind management is important in yoga – learn how to relax, how to concentrate, and eventually move spontaneously into a meditative state.

Understanding mind and emotions

What is emotion? Raw energy in motion is emotion, energy which you cannot control. When there is anxiety, the state of anxiety is so overpowering that it controls the entire behaviour of the person. Anger and fear are so overpowering that you cannot control them; frustration is so overpowering that you don't know how to free yourself from it. These are the raw energies that manifest in your life. They are not associated with logic; there is no logic to fear, anger, frustration or depression. Although you can justify these states, these justifications do not reflect the management of emotions. In life, mind management and emotion management are the two important aspects which need to be cultivated and

understood. Only by understanding mind and emotion can one understand spirituality.

Spirituality means coming closer to one's own inner nature, cultivating the positive, the constructive and creative within to become a good human being. Many people believe that enlightenment is the answer, but I don't think so. It is a distant reality in our life. A blind man wants to see the sun; that is his desire, not his need. The need of a blind person is to acquire vision, and once he acquires vision then he does not only see the sun, he can look at the entire creation in full glory.

In the same manner, spiritual illumination is not the target of life as many people believe; it is an outcome of an awakened, integrated and developed human nature and personality. How can one be spiritual if the mind is in turmoil and the emotions are going haywire? It is not possible. Therefore, only through the management of the mind and by giving a direction to the emotions can one become spiritual, come closer to one's own nature and cultivate the positive qualities of life.

You have come to India and have seen various aspects of India. India is a multidimensional country. There is a political India, a corporate India, a tourist, religious, spiritual and a cultural India. Sometimes it may be difficult to differentiate between these Indias, yet the distinction is there. I represent the spiritual India as the tradition from which I come is a spiritual yogic tradition.

Jnana yoga is for the development of the faculties of the intellect, the head. Bhakti yoga is the process of emotion management, and karma yoga harnesses the process of the hands, the creativity. God has given us all the possibilities. Just as in a seed the development of a tree is hidden, in the same manner, within us there is the potential that can make us into a super being, however, we have not been able to harness or discover it. God did not give Christ or Mohammed something extra to make them better than you or me. We all came endowed with the same possibilities and potentials, but some people have been able to access that level, others

have not been able to. The ultimate destiny of human life is to come to the point of spiritual realization within oneself. When that spiritual realization comes within oneself, then peace, compassion and love become the predominant feelings and emotions which guide the behaviour.

Life is a garden

When I first joined the ashram I was very young and my guru, Swami Satyananda, was going on a program tour. He called me and said, "While I am out you look after the gardens." I was very happy that I was given this responsibility and did my best to look after the garden. After some time when my guru returned, he called me and said, "Did you follow my instructions?" I said, "Yes." "But I don't see any work done in the gardens. All the shrubs and plants are droopy, what has happened? What did you do?" I said, "Swamiji, every morning I went with a cloth and wiped the dust from the leaves. I used to carry a bottle of perfume, smell the flowers and if they did not have any smell I would put perfume on them. I would clean the fruits until they shined, I would remove the bugs. I did my best to look after them." He only asked me one question, "Did you ever water the plants?" I kept quiet because I had not done it.

Then he said to me, and that was the first lesson I received, "My son, life is like a garden, the body is the trunk, the senses are the branches, the thoughts are the leaves, achievements are the flowers and fruits, but the roots are hidden, they cannot be seen, they are underground and that is the human spirit which has to be watered. How can we water the root of our life, the spirit? Just as the body needs food to survive and the mind needs happiness to survive, the spirit needs sanyam to survive."

Sanyam is a Sanskrit word, which in English means being in control of one's own faculties. Just as you are able to ride a horse and control the horse, in the same manner, you have to control, restrain, your own inner behaviours and nature. Food is necessary for the body, happiness is necessary for the mind, and this inner discipline is necessary for the spirit.

When Patanjali was asked, 'What is yoga?' He said, 'Yoga is nothing but a discipline'. The next question was, 'What would be the outcome of this discipline?' His answer was, 'You would be able to manage the upheavals and disruptions of the mind through this discipline'. The third question was, 'What will happen when we are able to control the mind?' His answer was, 'You will realize your true nature'. These three statements have become the foundation of yogic philosophy. Personal discipline, knowing the mind and realizing one's own nature. These three statements represent the aim of yoga and of spiritual life.

You have to make sure that in your life you are able to somehow integrate certain practices or attitudes which can help rebuild your psychological and emotional structures so that you can live a full life. What is the need of human beings today? Peace is one need, which is personal and social; prosperity is another need, so that you can live a comfortable life. Happiness is another need. You are searching for peace, prosperity and happiness.

To search for peace, prosperity and happiness you have to bring a balance in your life, which until today you have not been able to do. Therefore, in your routine, for at least ten minutes, either morning or night before going to sleep, you should just sit quietly. Those ten minutes disconnect from the world – I am not the husband, I am not the father, I am not the wife, I am not the daughter, I am not the son, I am not a friend, I am nothing except the pure spirit. This is disconnection from your association with the world. Disconnect from the associations with your family for those ten minutes and just be yourself.

Breath and mantra

When you are yourself at that time observe your breath, for breath reflects the state of body, mind and emotion which you are facing. It is a known fact that whatever you feel inside changes the rhythm of breath. When you are anxious your breathing is different. When you are angry, relaxed, fearful, joyous or happy, your breathing is different. Breath is the

measuring tool of the mental and emotional states. For those five, ten minutes, simply observe the breath and lengthen the breath, making the breath long and deep. Make it so that you are not at all under any kind of tension or stress during breathing; be totally comfortable and relaxed.

With your breath use a particular mantra. *Mantra* is a sound, a vibration, a frequency. Your bodies are compressed energy, nothing more than that. If you look at yourself with a super-microscope what will you see? Behind the layers of skin, muscles, ligaments, bones, when you go into the atomic structure, even inside the atom you will find a pulsation of energy.

Solid matter, like a table, is nothing but compressed energy. In the symbolical development of the five elements, space is the first container, which contains all the other elements. From space comes air, air evolves into fire, fire into water and water into earth. These are the five elements. These five elements are pulsations of energy, just as matter is compressed energy, space is vast, infinite energy. Mantra, is a sound, a vibration, which alters the frequencies of body, brain and mind.

One experiment was done in Barcelona in the year 1979. I was called to one hospital and asked, "Is there a method by which we can reduce the tension in people when they come for an operation?" I said, "Yes, mantra." As an experiment, we hooked about twenty people up with ECG, EEG, GSR, and asked them to simply sit straight on the bed or chair, and to breathe in deeply and upon exhalation chant the mantra *Om* for five minutes. We saw that there was an increase in alpha activity. There was reduction in the heartbeat. The blood pressure, which increases at the time of anxiety, came down to normal levels. The mental tension reduced. The result was that the quantity of anaesthesia given prior to any operation or surgery was reduced by fifty percent.

After the surgery the patients were taken through a process of deep relaxation where they were able to visualize and witness the healing taking place in their own bodies, and direct their own mental forces to enforce the healing. This happened in 1979, and this program is still going on in that hospital.

Experience So Ham

At the time of inhalation, mentally repeat the mantra *So*, and at the time of exhalation the mantra *Ham*. *So* at the inhalation, *Ham* during exhalation, making the breath longer and deeper each time. After five to ten minutes, gradually externalize the mind, externalize the consciousness and slowly open your eyes. This ten-minute practice will change the entire perspective of life. You give twenty-three hours and fifty minutes to your work, to your family, to your society; give ten minutes in twenty-four hours to experience that serenity within yourself.

When water falls on a rock drop by drop, drop by drop, in the course of time it makes a hole. It becomes a container. The hole becomes bigger and bigger with each drop of water that falls in it. In the same manner, you do not have to begin your spiritual journey by doing two or three hours of practices with great gusto and then the balloon deflates after a week. No. Just ten minutes, nothing more than that – breath and mantra.

You will discover that in less than thirty days the quality of your mind improves. You become more sensitive to the needs of your feelings, emotions, attitudes, thoughts and ideas. You are able to find the right way to express them, without coming into confrontation with any situation. Just as water flows, and despite all the barriers that you can put, it will find its way by going around it, in the same manner your own behaviour and responses to the situations in life changes with ten minutes of meditation every day. Let this be the beginning of the spiritual journey in your life.

You know a donkey belonged to a washerman, and it was used to carry the loads of clothes. One day the washerman sold the donkey to a bookseller. Now instead of carrying loads of clothes, the donkey was carrying loads of books. The donkey started to feel, 'I have become knowledgeable for now I am carrying books'. We are all like that donkey, for a little thing that we receive, we begin to believe that we know. That knowledge is only superficial, intellectual, it is not experiential. We have to move into the experiential dimension

of life from the intellectual dimension of life. Experience brings maturity to the mind, emotion and to life. If there is no experience, there is no maturity. Spiritual life is a process of experiencing and re-discovering ourselves. Let us go on a journey of a small discovery.

Practice

Please close your eyes for a few moments. Sit straight, place your feet flat on the floor and hands on top of the thighs. Keep the spine straight and gently close your eyes. With your eyes closed become aware of the whole body. Mentally, internally, see the posture of your body, the way you are sitting, the placement of your feet, the position of your legs, where the hands are kept on top of the thighs or knees, the posture of the spine. Try to see the whole body internally as if you are looking at yourself in an inner mirror.

In your mind visualize a mirror, and see your body reflected in that mirror. See yourself reflected in that mirror.

Now observe the breath. Feel the breath inside the nostrils. When you inhale feel the coolness of breath as it passes through the nostrils inside. As you exhale, feel the warmth of the breath as it comes out. Be attentive to the experience of coolness and warmth as the breath comes in and goes out.

Now, visualize a transparent tube extending from the navel to the eyebrow centre inside your body. In that transparent tube, as you inhale see the breath come up from navel to the eyebrow centre as if you are pulling the breath from the navel to the eyebrow centre upon inhalation; as you exhale see the breath go down from the eyebrow centre to the navel. Just as one can see the movement of water in a plastic pipe, in the same manner, visualize the movement of breath from the navel to the eyebrow centre and from the eyebrow centre down to the navel.

Now, let us try another experiment. I will count from one to seven and as I begin the count from one you start breathing in and you should finish breathing in when I say

seven. Then you start breathing out when I say one and finish breathing out when I say seven, again seeing the movement of the breath in the passage between the navel and the eyebrow centre.

Continue in this manner for few more moments.

Observe the ascending breath and the descending breath between the navel and the eyebrow centre. Confine the respiration to the count of seven. You can adjust your breathing so that you are comfortable. Seven seconds breathing in, seven seconds breathing out.

Now, mentally, as you inhale say the mantra *So*, as you exhale say the mantra *Ham*. *So* is the sound of the ascending breath and *Ham* is the sound of the descending breath. *So* with inhalation *Ham* with exhalation. With total awareness say mentally the mantra *So Ham* with every inhalation and exhalation.

Do this practice for a few moments. Identify completely with the movement of the breath and the mantra.

Now stop this practice and become aware of yourself. Any thought that comes to your mind, observe it.

Do not try to think, be an observer of all thoughts that come into the mind. It happens many times that when you begin to observe, the thoughts they do not come. If that is the case, then become aware of the thoughtless state. The moment you become aware of the thoughtless state of mind, you will observe that thoughts will again emerge from the depth of your consciousness.

Be a witness to thoughts, be a witness to the absence of thoughts, as the case may be. Do not try to think, just observe whatever kind of thought arises.

Now, you are going to use the mantra *Om*. Breathe in deeply, and as you breathe out begin to chant short *Om* in the following manner: *Om Om Om Om Om Om Om*, seven *Om* on the exhalation, then again you breathe in for seven seconds. Then again seven times *Om* on the exhalation.

Now take a deep breath in, and we shall chant the mantra *Om* three times.

Feel the space and the silence within you. Become aware of the state of silence and space inside you and around you. After a few moments become aware of your surroundings, the sounds you hear, your body, and any sensations in the body. And when you are ready, gently open the eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

This is the short meditative practice that I recommend that everyone practises daily, whenever possible, for five to ten minutes. By practising this you will not be converting yourself, rather you will be improving yourself.

I hope that this simple form of meditation is the beginning of your spiritual understanding for as the global warming is taking place, the human heart is cooling down. When the human heart cools down and is not warm any more, then separation and distances increase between people. If you are able to warm up your hearts by connecting with your own inner strength through developing, understanding, and experiencing silence and peace, you will be able to not only improve the quality of your life but the quality of your society and the planet. Therefore, yoga in its broadest sense means connection not only between the individual soul and the higher soul, but also with the environment and with other human beings who all share the basic qualities of life.

2008

Lucknow

Hyderabad

Improving Concentration and Memory

22 February 2008, Lucknow, M.R. Jaipuria School,
talking to children aged 9 to 14

‘Feeling fine’ means that your body, mind, emotions, feelings, thoughts, everything is in harmony with each other. There is no physical disability or illness, there is no mental stress and tiredness, and there is always a feeling of being happy, and all of you are lucky to feel this way. Because when I have asked the same question to grown-ups they all say, ‘I’m not fine.’ And many of them say, ‘I’m having physical problems, physical diseases, therefore I don’t feel fine.’ Many people say, ‘I’m having a lot of work stress, and therefore I don’t feel fine.’ So the feeling of fine which you are having is a big achievement, and it is how it should be all the time.

As we grow up our body changes, our mind changes and we subject ourselves to stress, anxiety, tension, and that disturbs the usual pattern of life, and that is where physical problems come. That is where mental problems come. Our ancestors many, many thousands of years ago, came up with a system by which even those people who are grown-ups and who are having conflicts and problems in life, can overcome them and develop the feeling of fineness in their life. The system which they created is known as yoga, and yoga is an old subject of our civilization.

You are studying history, and in that you will find that in this world many civilizations have come and gone. Only a few civilizations have maintained their character and their culture. The civilizations which are the most ancient in the world today

are the Chinese civilization and the Indian civilization because they have a long history; they have established cultures, norms, thinking patterns.

All the other civilizations in the world have changed a lot over a period of time due to war, due to invasion, due to change of ideologies and beliefs, due to change in their lifestyle and due to changes in the natural environment where they live. The ancient civilizations have survived because they have included certain disciplines to improve the quality of life.

Yoga and the Sivananda tradition

Yoga is one such discipline which helps to improve the quality of life, whether we be young, whether we be adults or whether we be old people, whether we be male, whether we be female. This is how yoga should be understood.

Yoga is a science. Just as medical science is one, yoga science is one. But in medicine you have many different branches, people who specialize in ENT problems (ear, nose, throat problems), people who specialize in respiratory problems, people who specialize in cardiac problems, people who specialize in gastric problems, people who are specialists for bones, people who are specialists for the brain. There are many different branches and faculties of medical science.

In the same manner yoga is one subject, but there are many branches and faculties of this yogic science. The asanas that you practise, that you see on television, that you see your elders practise, they represent only one faculty of the entire yogic subject. Like this there are over eighty different faculties in yoga, of which asana is only one faculty, of which respiration is another faculty, of which meditation is another faculty. Each tries to improve the quality of one dimension of life, like when you practise the asana, you improve your health. You are able to avoid many problems and illnesses by strengthening your immune system, by cultivating your nervous system. Then there are other practices which improve the quality of the mind. They cultivate concentration. They cultivate memory. They cultivate the ability to relax. In this

manner all the different practices of yoga deal with one dimension of human life, one area of human life, and they try to make it better.

Before I tell you about yoga I would like to speak about our *parampara*, our tradition. The founder of our parampara is Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. He was a medical doctor, one of the topmost medical doctors in the early part of the last century. When he came to yoga, he brought all his medical knowledge and skills to understand the process and the practices of yoga. Being a doctor he was able to know how each practice would influence and alter the performance of the human body systems and mental systems, and he developed yoga and propagated yoga in the early 1940s.

He instructed all his disciples, “Look, in the coming time with the increase of stress and pressures in society, people are going to need lot of help to manage the illness of body and mind, and therefore it should be our duty to bring yoga to society and to teach yoga in society, so that everyone, whether they be young people or old people, are benefited by these practices.” Then all his disciples spread out throughout the world and started to propagate yoga. Swami Sivananda, the founder of our parampara was the first-generation teacher of yoga in the world. All his disciples who spread out throughout the world brought the message of yoga, and they became the forerunners of yoga, the second generation. I belong to the third generation of sannyasins of our tradition who are propagating this science of yoga.

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal

My work has been mainly with children as I believe that if the future belongs to children, then children have to be better equipped to manage their own conditions in life and to achieve success, prosperity and peace.

In Bihar I come from a place called Munger, and in Munger we have a small organization, smaller than your school, but there, the work that we do for yoga is, I would say, phenomenal. Incredible. There we have established an organization for children called Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, and

this organization started with seven children of your age group, between the ages of seven and fourteen. Initially we trained these seven children as yoga teachers. They in turn taught yoga to many other children, monitored them regularly and the practices that the children performed. This work started in 1995. Now it is 2008. Thirteen years have gone by. Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal now, in Munger city itself, has 7,000 children members. All these 7,000 children gather together during the summer vacation to practise yoga for one week.

We teach them new concepts and practices of yoga. These children, during the year, conduct yoga classes in their own schools for other children. In Munger city the number is 7,000, and in Munger district the number is 29,000, and throughout India the number is about one lakh twenty thousand! These are children who are fully integrated with yoga. They do their studies, they have their games, they live with their families, and they are the most bright children. The result of their yoga training makes such a big impact that our past president of the country, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, came twice in a span of nine months to Munger to meet with all these yoga children.

The children themselves conducted scientific research with a group of 700 children to see what yoga can do to improve memory. We study and if we do not have memory, right memory, then whatever we study, we forget quickly. So improvement of memory and improvement of concentration so that we can focus, can concentrate on what we are doing, what we are studying. The third research was on creativity. Then there was discipline. How you make yourself disciplined. And like this they looked into different parameters. They had two groups: one group which did not practise yoga of 350 children, and another group which practised yoga of 350 children, and they did the testing before and after. They found that after three months of yoga practice, the children's IQ had improved by 30%. If you see that research you will find three asanas, one pranayama, and one mantra created a big change in the mind. The memory span increased, concentration span increased, awareness increased.

This was such a wonderful research that it was presented in UNESCO in the year 2000 in France, Paris. Looking at this change in the quality of mind in students, UNESCO took a decision to make yoga a subject in 17 countries. In 17 countries, in the UNESCO-run schools, yoga is being taught to everyone. In France and in Europe we also have another children's organization, and through this organization yoga is taught in schools, in colleges, in universities. Also in America we have an organization for children, and that organization is looked after by Rishi Arundhati. That organization is Yoga Education in Schools (YES). It is in touch with all the schools in North America, and from time to time regular training is given to children and also to professors and teachers so that they can incorporate yoga in their education syllabus. Like this our work has been a lot with children, and we find that those children who have adopted yoga as part of their daily culture, discipline and routine have improved tremendously in their studies and in their academic performance.

Practices to improve memory and concentration

I want to show you some asanas that will be useful for improving concentration, memory, the power of retention and awareness, and to develop personal discipline. The first one is known as shashankasana.

In the research, the children used to practise this asana for 10 rounds every day, which takes about 5 minutes, and they found that through this asana, the memory improves.

Why? In our body there are many different glands which secrete hormones for the development of the physical body, brain and mind. This asana has a direct influence on the major endocrine glands of the body. More specifically, the adrenal gland. When the adrenal gland is active, one becomes agitated. When you are able to maintain a regulated outflow of the adrenal hormones, then the mental dissipation reduces greatly, one is able to focus better and the memory improves. So this is one practice for the improvement of memory.

The second practice to improve concentration is bhramari pranayama. You plug the ears then you take a deep breath

in, and when you breathe out you make a humming sound. Then again you breathe in, and again you make the humming sound. Why do you practise it? To improve concentration.

The third practice which you all should try to do at home is the series of postures known as *surya namaskara*. It is a good practice to receive vitality from the sun and the solar rays, through which *prana shakti* is received. But of course the sun's rays give energy only early in the morning before the sun actually becomes hot, when the sun is still red in colour. When you practise *surya namaskara*, and when the sun is red, at that time the sun's rays carry the life-giving force which is known as *prana shakti*. When you practise *surya namaskara*, the body is actually attracting that *prana shakti*, and suddenly you feel energized, dynamic and fresh.

For the health of the body, the practice of *surya namaskara* is a must. For improving memory and concentration the practices of *shashankasana* and *bhramari pranayama* are a must. You need to do only a few practices in order to relieve stress from your mind. Children accumulate a lot of stress at the time of exams as they have to study hard and are under a lot of pressure to perform well and to acquire the highest mark possible. At that time, when you are studying for long hours at night and feel tired, sometimes the next morning when you go to school, you are so nervous that you forget whatever you have read, and when you have to write, nothing comes out, the mind goes blank because of nervousness. We do not want you to go through that stage, we want you to come to a stage where you can retain whatever you read in your mind.

The evolving brain

Once upon a time, a *sannyasin* named Swami Vivekananda went from India to America. One day he went to the library and took out four or five big books, and brought them home. The next day, Swami Vivekananda went again to the library, returned the books, took out another four large volumes, and came home. The next day again he went to the library, returned the books, borrowed more books and went home. This went on for ten or fifteen days. The librarian used to

observe this person taking books one day and returning them the next, she thought, ‘This person does not know English; otherwise, why would he take so many books and return them the next day without reading them?’

So she said to Swami Vivekananda “Why don’t you only take one book and take your time reading it?”

Swami Vivekananda said, “But I read every book.”

She said, “Impossible. How can you read four or five large volumes in one day?”

Swami Vivekananda said, “You can ask me anything about what I have read in the book and I will tell you.”

The librarian took a book which Swami Vivekananda had borrowed a week ago and asked him, “What is written in the book?”

Vivekananda said, “Ask me which page.”

She said, “What is written on page 75, second paragraph?”

Swami Vivekananda repeated the entire paragraph that was written in the book.

Next, “What is written on page 205, first paragraph?”

Swami Vivekananda read the entire paragraph. In this way the librarian tested Swami Vivekananda with all the books that he had taken and discovered that this swami knew each and every word and sentence and letter that was written in the book. Then she asked, “Swamiji, how do you read so fast?”

He said, “I have a photographic memory.”

When you have a photographic memory, you just have to keep turning the pages, and the mind keeps on taking pictures, and then you can close the book, close your eyes, open page 95 and read the page in your mind. Open page number ten, and read it in your mind. Open page 58 and read it in your mind. That is called a photographic memory, and Swami Vivekananda had that. When he returned to India, and this story came to be known as a feat and achievement he had displayed in America, people asked him, “How did you cultivate that memory? Previously you were Narendra, an ordinary person like us. You used to fail in your class, you used to pass in your class, just like ordinary people. How come all of a sudden you have a photographic memory?” Swami

Vivekananda said it was because of the sadhana, meditation and concentration that he practised every day.

This is an achievement, which you can also have, this is an ability, which you can also acquire. Provided you are sincere in your commitment and devoted to your practices. Therefore, the yoga practices should not be taken lightly. Rather, they have a lot of power, and they can change the entire mind structure. This yoga is important for children, because if we can increase our own potentials of the mind then there is no limit to our achievement.

In science we come to know that only ten percent of the brain is active within us, and ninety percent of the brain is in a state of dormancy, sleeping. Today, you, I and all the people in the world function with only ten percent of their brain. Naturally we are also developing the other areas of the brain in the course of normal evolution. Our ancestors, the stone age men, who used to live in caves, who did not have language, did not know how to use tools and make food, who used to hunt and to wear clothes made from leaves of the tree, or animal skin, maybe their active brain power was one percent. Over a period of time, from one percent our brain power has increased to ten percent and in the future it will keep on increasing more and more.

When Einstein died, scientists preserved his brain. They wanted to know how Einstein was more of a genius than other people of his time. Maybe Einstein had cultivated two percent more of his brain than the average brain at that time. So if the average brain capacity was ten percent, Einstein had developed twelve percent. Similarly, if the average capacity of our brain is ten percent, Swami Vivekananda with his photographic memory had developed more qualities of the brain. This is interesting as we are going through the process wherein our brain power is gradually increasing little by little, little by little, every day more and more. If we can through the practice of yoga enhance the ability of our brain, then there is no limit to what we can achieve in our own life. Therefore, it is my request to all of you to take yoga seriously and to give yoga a chance in your life for the betterment of yourself.

Living Life Gracefully

24 February 2008, Hindi Samsthan, Lucknow,
talk delivered to judges, police and administrative officers,
entrepreneurs and professionals

Living life gracefully and yoga, these two concepts are synonymous with each other. Yoga is concerned with the betterment of the qualities of life. Therefore, since ancient times, yoga has been presented to human society in many different ways. It has been identified as a *vidya*, understanding and knowledge of life; as a *vijnana*, there is a sequential development perceivable in the practices of yoga which can be identified as a science; and it has also been identified as a *sanskriti* or culture, as it empowers the individual to express the best of their life spontaneously, perfectly and creatively. In this manner yoga has been presented to us by our rishis in different forms at different times.

Another important point is that yoga is not Indian. In the seventies when I went to South America, I researched the ancient cultures of those countries and discovered that the ancient civilizations of South America, Scandinavia and Africa, used to practise yoga. They have left definite proofs that yoga was part of their culture and references to that can be found in their books and statues. Pre-Columbian art and sculptures depict the traditional yogic postures and techniques which convey the idea of spiritual development in every individual.

Due to the ravages of time, climatic accidents, natural accidents and human migration, the science and subject of yoga was lost in those countries. It was preserved in this country by a group of renunciates called *sannyasins*, who preserved the knowledge of the tradition of yoga. These renunciates used to live away from society and dedicated

their lives to contemplation, to understanding the intricate connection between nature, human and the Divine. In the course of time, when it was felt by these seers of our land that in the future our society would need yogic intervention to manage their difficulties, problems and distresses in life, then they started to propagate yoga. It was Swami Vivekananda who first spoke of yoga openly and publicly. He did not give a clear indication of the yogic practices, rather he spoke on the theory of yoga in the form of raja yoga, hatha yoga, karma yoga and bhakti yoga.

Swami Sivananda

After Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, the promoter of our tradition, brought yoga into the realm of science. Swami Sivananda is my Paramguru, or grandfather guru. We belong to his tradition, his *parampara*. Swami Sivananda was a medical practitioner and one of the first FRCS doctors in India in the 1930s. He served as a medical doctor in Malaya, but he had a spiritual calling. He came back to India and went to Rishikesh where he established the Divine Life Society.

His views were that each person is capable of leading a divine life. This divine life does not mean a religious life, it does not mean a life in which you are constantly thinking about God, but a life in which you can express your creative abilities and experience transcendence and freedom from the bondages of illness, whether physical, psychological or even spiritual. Although our tradition is that of Vedanta, Swami Sivananda instructed his disciples not to propagate Vedanta as that was not the need of the society. If a person is suffering from a physical problem, what is the use of telling him to have a vedantic attitude to life, that this life is transitory and God is the ultimate reality? By saying that you do not help that person overcome his problem, his pain and suffering. So he instructed his disciples to practise Vedanta, but in their social life to teach yoga.

One of his disciples was Swami Satyananda Saraswati, who was sent by his guru with a mandate to propagate yoga from

door to door and shore to shore. With this mission Swami Satyananda Saraswati established the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, Bihar, in 1963. Since then Bihar School of Yoga has been striving to distil the yogic theories and concepts, ideas, principles and practices from the ancient traditions and scriptures – to make them understandable for our needs and intellect today, and applicable in our life. Therefore, today Bihar School of Yoga is one of the pioneer institutions in the world to bring out the yogic concepts and practices from the scriptural references, and yoga has become a household word.

However, despite all the advances in yoga, there is still confusion as to its benefits. Some people say it is good for health, some say it is good for the mind, some that it is good for spiritual development, some that it is a method by which one can experience God. They are all welcome to their opinion, but from my understanding and my studies, I have come to a conclusion that yoga is a science of life, a science of living. That is how we have to understand yoga today, not as a spiritual practice but as a science of life to be applied in our life.

Our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, used to say that the three main qualities of human beings are intellect, emotion and the ability to perform action. If we are able to develop the potentials of our intellect, emotions and action, then no matter which field of life, which profession we are involved in, there is no question – we will gain peace and prosperity. It was with this idea that the Sivananda parampara, the Sivananda tradition, propagated yoga – for the integrated development of the human character, mind and personality. If we look at the system and structure of yoga, we discover that this is also the aim and aspiration of yoga. Each yoga takes you to a destination, each yoga has a specific aim, a direction and each yoga complements the others.

Understanding aims and systems

One yoga by itself is not complete, but the combination makes yoga complete. Take the example of cooking vegetables. When you cook vegetables at home you have a certain quantity of

vegetable, a certain quantity of water, a certain quantity of salt, a certain quantity of oil, a certain quantity of spices. It is the right combination of these different ingredients that makes a vegetable or any good item tasty. However, if to one kilo of vegetable you add a kilo of water, a kilo of salt and a kilo of spices, what will it taste like? Useless, tasteless, hopeless, worthless. There has to be the right combination in yoga as well to make it palatable, to make it useful for ourselves. This is where the actual training in yoga plays a major role.

Today our concept in India is changing. Previously we used to believe that only renunciates and sadhus need to practise yoga, for it is good for their spiritual development and a way of God-realization. Now people are resorting to yoga to manage the physical imbalances, diseases and disorders which they cannot manage with any other therapy. Yet this does not mean that yoga has the answers to all the problems and difficulties. Those who claim that yoga has solutions to all the problems have not understood yoga. Yoga is a science, a structured system, with a specific aim, specific practices, all of which create a transformation in our personality, in our body, in our emotions, in our feelings. The betterment of these states leads us to a greater appreciation of life, to greater participation and enhanced creativity in life. Therefore, the practices of yoga have to be adjusted according to each individual. It is not a universal practice that anybody can do to derive the same benefit. We all have a different physiological structure, psychological makeup, belief system, dietary system, professional system; and each condition or environment that we confront in life either enhances the potentials of the personality or depletes the potential of the personality.

Role of stress

The right kind of living enhances the potentials of life. The wrong kind of living disturbs the balanced pattern of life. Today we are living in a disturbed environment – in society, in the family and within one's own mind. This disturbed environment which we create within ourselves, in our family, in our society, exists as we have never had any training or

education on how to deal with our own mental problems, our own psychological problems. When we study we are taught to develop many skills, prosper and perform in life, but in no school or educational institution are we given a training that tells us how to deal with the mind when it is confronted by problems, difficulties, stress and anxiety.

Today distress is the pain of human life. I am not anti-stress. Stress is a must, a necessity of life, but when stress becomes distress, then life is disturbed and destroyed. When stress becomes eustress, then it uplifts the human character and personality. In our life, we also need tension for without tension, there would be no motivation and no action. But we have to know when this tension becomes distress in life. Right now we face distresses, imbalances and difficulties. So yoga has come forward with four projects.

Hatha yoga

The first project is to regulate the body functions so that there are no imbalances in the bodily systems leading to high distress, which later on becomes a disease. Have you ever thought about the definition of disease? The word 'ease' means to be in a state of comfort, to be at ease with yourself. You are comfortable with yourself, everything is in harmony. When that state of ease, that state of comfort is disturbed or changed, the prefix is 'dis', disturbed. Disease is the disturbed state of the body.

This disturbed condition can easily be rectified as the body contains within it the possibility of damaging itself through irregular life patterns and habits, and also of improving itself through regulated life patterns and habits. When we find that we are moving towards disease, and our peace is being disturbed, it is a clear indication that there are certain irregularities in our life of which we should become observant. When we are able to manage those irregularities ease comes again. This is the concept of hatha yoga. Regulate your life in such a way, through exercises, through respiration, through other practices, so that you have total physical harmony and you are able to eradicate all those problems which

influence the performance of the senses and body. Therefore, the purpose of hatha yoga is *sharira shuddhi*, purification, detoxification and regularization, harmonization of the body and its internal organs so that health is attained.

Health is not the absence of disease from life or the body. What is the meaning or definition of health? Health does not mean that illnesses or diseases are absent, for that is not possible. It has been the experience of everyone that when you are born, from that moment onwards, your life, your body, your mind is subject to change. Whenever changes happen an imbalance will always be created until you again get used to that state of living. In the initial stages of that imbalance, the body will undergo changes which can lead to an illness. After all at a certain age, naturally and spontaneously there are hormonal changes in the body. When hormonal changes happen in the life of a young person, an adult, a female and male, we know the havoc these changes can create in the functions of both body and mind. Science also agrees with the fact that such hormonal changes occur in the body more frequently when we are young and less frequently as we grow, but still every ten to twenty years' time the body goes through its own internal changes. Therefore, you will find that young people are more prone to illnesses, adults are less prone to illnesses and the elderly are more prone to illnesses. Immunity is low when you are young, immunity develops when you become an adult, and again immunity goes down as you age. Immunity is the reflection of the physical changes that are taking place naturally, unconsciously, spontaneously in our body. So *vyadhi*, disease, is the natural outcome of life. *Jara*, old age, is also a natural outcome of life. Between life and death, you go through these two changes, disease and old age. So there cannot be one hundred percent eradication of disease.

Health does not denote that your body is absolutely one hundred percent free from illnesses. Health denotes that there is an awareness of how to manage different problems as and when they come up at different times in our life. The World Health Organization has defined health: when there

is harmony at all levels, physical, mental, spiritual, moral, emotional, social, there is the experience of health. The World Health Organization has not defined health as the absence of disease from the body. It has defined health as a regulated lifestyle, as harmony between body, emotions, mind, spiritual qualities, morality, social living, character. Everything is involved.

In Hindi the word for health is *swasti*. *Swa* means 'one's own' and *sta* means 'to be established' in body, in mind, one who is aware of the body and the mind. This idea of *swasti*, health, is contained in the yogic tradition. *Swaroope avasthanam* means 'to be established in one's own nature'. When you are established in your own self, then you experience health. Yoga has always followed this definition of *swasti*. Therefore, the concept of health is not only physical, it is also psychological, it is not only psychological, it is also spiritual. The spiritual dimension of our life is the root of our existence.

Our spiritual roots

If you look at a tree above ground, you see the trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit. If you want to sustain the tree, what do you do? Do you look after the trunk, the branches, the leaves, the flowers and the fruits, or do you take care of the roots? If you take care of the roots, that tree becomes strong. If you ignore the roots, no matter how big the tree is, how ancient the tree is, in a storm, it will come down. If we apply this example to our own selves, we will discover that we have ignored our roots and we have identified with the upper part of the tree, the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the ego. We have ignored our roots, we lack willpower, we lack mental clarity, we lack an understanding of the situation or people or our environment. Our self-oriented perceptions become more predominant in our life for personal gain and pleasure, and they do not allow us to contribute substantially and positively to the development of the human society and civilization as one family.

Therefore, yoga practice begins with developing awareness of our roots. That is the theory of yoga. It is for this reason

that the concept of atma comes in yoga, not as a philosophical darshan or treatise of spiritual life. Yoga does not advocate any belief system, and therefore it can be accepted by people in all sections of society. Christians have adopted yoga without any problems; Muslims have adopted yoga without any problems. The propagation of yoga around the world today is not due to the Indian effort but due to westerners who have investigated this subject and popularized it. The awareness of yoga which we have developed today in our society is due to the acceptance by other conscientious civilizations. We wonder why those people are adopting yoga when we are unable to understand what yoga is. People throughout the world have accepted yoga. In fact, our major work related to yoga in the early days took place in Islamic countries, in Iran, Iraq, Jordan and Morocco. While yoga was being developed in Europe, it was also being taught in these countries, and ashrams were established. Even today, Bihar School of Yoga is the only organization in the world whose books are published in Arabic and are available in Iran and Iraq and other Islamic countries. It shows that there is no conflict between yoga and other religious followers.

Yoga does not preach any dogma. If I believe in Rama, it is my belief, if I believe in Shiva, it is my belief, if I believe in Christ, it is my belief, if I believe in Allah, it is my belief. My belief does not change the fact that the needs of the body and mind in each civilization, in each individual, are the same. If a Hindu suffers from diabetes, a Christian or a Muslim also suffers from diabetes. The practices which you apply to help manage your own condition are universal.

In India, the confusion has been that yoga is part of religion. For this reason I started off by saying that yoga is not Indian. It may have sounded peculiar to you, but that is the truth. It was the culture that promoted the development of the faculties of body, mind and spirit. In this process of sharira shuddhi or physical purity, hatha yoga was used. Even today, if you visit museums in Mexico and in South American countries, you will find statues carbon-dated many thousands of years. This indicates that yoga was practised

in the American continent, in Scandinavian and in African countries in the same form as it is done today, yet it was part of the ancient culture.

Raja yoga – how to manage the mind

After the attainment of health at the physical level and removal of imbalances from the body, after having attained physical purity, sharira shuddhi, we can move onto the next dimension of yoga, which is management of mental behaviour. Possibly today what we need to educate ourselves in is how to manage our own mind. If we are able to deal with our mind rationally and practically, then the stresses will go away, and one can live life gracefully. Mind is the key in the management of life. This is where raja yoga plays a major role; it tells you how to modify the mental behaviour, the mental attitude, the mental concepts, perceptions, ideas and beliefs and how to refine them so you are able to connect at a different level with each individual.

Raja yoga has eight stages. All the eight different levels of training in raja yoga deal with the mind. The yamas and niyamas, the first two stages of raja yoga, help to improve the behaviour and expression of the mind by changing the attitude, giving a different perspective and vision of one's own life, and by making the understanding of one's own behaviour much deeper so that one can regulate the negative aspects of one's nature.

When we are under tension and unable to release the tension, what symptoms do we see? Obsessive thinking, sleeplessness, high blood pressure and other allied problems come up. But the main ones are obsessive thinking, sleeplessness, tiredness, lack of hunger, lack of motivation, worry and anxiety. These mental states also affect the physiological behaviours. After all, if you are thinking about why you can't sleep, the thought affects the nervous system and the brain, which does not allow them to shut down the system and allow you to rest. Tension does not allow you to shut down your own systems. Even when you are trying to rest, all the units of this factory are in full swing 24/7.

We are unable to disconnect ourselves from our own problems and difficulties. More than that we are unable to extract ourselves from the obsessive nature that develops by thinking about the problem and difficulty. The yamas and niyamas, the asana and pranayama of raja yoga (which are different to the hatha yoga versions) and pratyahara, dharana and dhyana are a gradual progression or gradual training in how we can manage our own mental expressions and behaviours.

Relaxation

The first training in yoga is learning how to relax. People think that performing asana is the first training in yoga, but they are wrong. In raja yoga, asanas become the means to achieve relaxation. In the *Yoga Sutras* Patanjali defines asana as: *Sthiram sukham aasanam* – “Asana is that posture in which you are comfortable and still, motionless.” If you are both still and comfortable at the same time, it indicates there is no dynamic activity going on in the body. If you sit straight, then you are sitting straight with absolute comfort, there is no discomfort in the body. If you are doing anything, you are experiencing comfort, there is no discomfort. This indicates that in the practices of asana and pranayama of raja yoga, more emphasis is given to stilling the physical activity, pacifying, relaxing, reducing the physical activity. In hatha yoga, you are increasing the physical activity but in raja yoga you reduce the physical activity to experience *sthira*, stillness, and *sukham*, comfort.

When the physical activity is reduced, the physical state of silence and stillness will influence the mind, the mental behaviour. The sensation of stillness and silence is being carried to the brain by our sensory and motor nervous systems, by our different senses. It is the hyperactivity of the senses and stimulations which create disturbance in the mind. However, if you reduce the activity of the senses, if you control and regulate the activity of the body, then the mind will reflect that state of peacefulness and tranquillity. Many times when our mind becomes hyperactive and we close our

eyes, we find that our eyes are moving continuously. It is a disturbing factor that the eyes do not become still but keep on moving even if you try to keep them closed. This creates tension. It is an indication of the nervous agitation which happens due to hyperactivity of the body or brain or mind. It also causes sleeplessness and anxiety.

Mantra

The first training in yoga is learning how to relax and how to release stresses and tensions. The major practices for that are mantra, yoga nidra and pratyahara. What is the role of mantra? Mantra has been defined as *mananat trayate iti mantrah* – “the force that liberates the mind from bondage”. Mind is one expression, but according to yoga this mind has been bifurcated into four groups. The first group is known as *manas*, which is the short form of *manana*, meaning that aspect of the mind which is continuously reflecting, thinking, reflecting, thinking, reflecting, thinking. The second aspect of the mind is *buddhi*, intellect, logic, rationality, analysis, understanding, absorption, retention. The third aspect is *chitta*, the impressions, memories and experiences which you carry in your unconscious, the storehouse of impressions. The fourth aspect is *ahamkara*, self-identity: I know I exist, I know I live for I am alive. These are the four components of the mind which we use in our day-to-day affairs.

Mantra has a specific purpose; it is a process by which you can free your mind from obsessive involvement in thought, from obsessive involvement in a situation which leads to anxiety and distress. The purpose of mantra is to free the mind from its self-created bondage and to connect the mind with the source of inner strength. This is the yogic concept of mantra. Of course there is the religious concept of mantra, that it is the name of God and those people who are devotional should repeat it. That is perfectly all right from the religious perspective. However, you have to understand the role of mantra from the yogic perspective. The yogic definition of mantra is *mananat trayate*, freeing the mind from obsessive reflection. Mantras are used to achieve this state of relaxation.

To achieve this disconnection traditionally, in vedic times, the mantra *So Ham* was used. There is an entire Upanishad written on this subject. The *Hamsa Upanishad* explains how to use the mantra with the incoming and outgoing breath to achieve greater perception of body and mind, and describes the different forms of concentration and meditation. Now, people always want to know the meaning of the mantra, so somebody said *So Ham* means 'I Am That'. But Kabirdas used to say that *So Ham* spontaneously awakens *anahata nada*, the source of all sound.

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai,
Soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahase ikkisau jaap,
Anahada upaje aape aapa.*

The mind has to be fixed in the awareness of breath and mantra in such a manner that the breath begins to naturally and spontaneously chant the mantra *So Ham*.

It is calculated that in twenty-four hours you breathe in and out approximately 21,600 times. If you are able to repeat the mantra *So Ham* with every incoming and outgoing breath and maintain that awareness for five minutes, ten minutes, and gradually increase the span of awareness until you come to the point where you are able to repeat the mantra twenty-four hours of the day, without missing a single breath, then an altered state of mind is experienced in which the unheard sounds are heard, the unseen visions are seen, the unknown tastes are tasted, *anahada upaje aape aapa*.

However, I am not talking of this level of sadhana, but about the use of mantra and the application of mantra to reduce the level of tension and stress and to give relaxation to the subtle mind. The simplest form is to repeat *So Ham* with the breath. It can be done whether you are sitting on a chair, on a sofa, on the floor, or you are lying on the floor or on your bed; it makes no difference. It can even be done when travelling in a car, but not while driving. You simply begin to observe your breath, you do not even have to close

your eyes. Know that you are breathing in and breathing out. Regulate the inhalation and the exhalation. With inhalation mentally say the mantra *So* with exhalation mentally say the mantra *Ham*. *So* becomes the sound of the ascending breath and *Ham* becomes the sound of the descending breath.

Do it for five minutes, and you will see the change in your own mind. Do it for a maximum of thirty minutes at night before going to sleep. You can lie supine on your bed ready to sleep. While you are lying flat on your bed, just see the movement of the breath between the navel and the throat. When you inhale, the breath goes from navel to throat, when you exhale the breath moves from throat to navel, horizontally. When you inhale and the breath moves from navel to throat, you say the mantra *So* mentally. When you exhale and the breath moves down from throat to navel, you say the mantra *Ham*. If you go to sleep while doing this, it does not matter. In fact, you will sleep better that night than other nights.

Yoga nidra

The second practice is yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is an invention of Swami Satyananda Saraswati, my guru. When he lived in Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, he discovered the nyasa system of tantra from which he developed the yoga nidra technique, the technique of deep relaxation. *Yoga nidra* means psychic sleep, in which the body sleeps but the mind remains alert and active. In the practice of yoga nidra, you do not move into the unconscious realm, you remain in the subconscious dimension. Normally when we sleep, we simply go from conscious to unconscious with a few minutes of subconscious in between. The experience of the subconscious in a state of relaxation happens when you feel drowsy. The experience of the unconscious state happens when you are in deep sleep and the experience of the conscious state happens when you are fully energized and active.

It has been said that when you are able to perfect the practice of yoga nidra, you can overcome the need to sleep. It is said in history that Napoleon used to sleep on horseback for ten minutes; he used to do something and be totally fresh

while sitting on horseback. People who have seen Gandhiji and who have known about him say that he would retire to his room for fifteen, twenty minutes, half an hour, and come out totally fresh. People speculated that he also used to practise yoga nidra. A process by which you are able to access your subconscious mind and achieve total physiological and psychological relaxation in a short time and again be ready to work, is only possible when you are able to somehow train your mind to access the subconscious, and in yoga nidra we access our subconscious dimension.

The body sleeps but the mind is active, and when you come out of that state you discover that even the mind has been relaxed. It is simple practice in which you have to rotate your consciousness through the different parts of the body and become aware of them and acknowledge them. You just have to observe your breath, you just have to become aware of the environment, you just have to visualize a few things which are already ingrained and inherent in your own memory to bring them out. You have to develop certain experiences which are already in your memory. You have to bring them out. Yoga nidra is a powerful system to achieve this psychological tranquillity.

Two years ago there was a conference in Vienna. At this conference, about 500 psychiatrists and psychologists from around the world had come to discuss how to treat the mental problems of people. One of our sannyasins was called to that conference and he gave a lecture on yoga nidra and after that the scientists wanted a practical experience of yoga nidra. At the same meeting they took a resolution that in their practices now they shall mainly use yoga nidra to treat mental problems. Apart from the normal conventional therapy the effort would be mainly to use the technique of yoga nidra to treat mental problems.

Yoga nidra is a powerful technique. I can tell you that myself, as I was a guinea pig to be experimented upon with yoga nidra. I was four years old when I joined the ashram, I never had any formal education in India, no school, no college, nothing. But my Guruji, Swami Satyananda, used

to put me in a yoga nidra state and while I was sleeping, he would read to me from different books, scriptures, science, medicine, maths, history. What I am today I attribute to the practice of yoga nidra – yoga nidra and of course the effort and grace that Guruji put into me. The entire learning took place in yoga nidra only. An interesting thing, which I recollect now, is that he would read to me one chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* while I was in yoga nidra. The next day he would ask me, “Have you read the fifth chapter of the *Gita*?” I would say “No.” He would say, “Open the book and read it.” I would open the book, look at the slokas and think, ‘I have read this somewhere. I know it already. It is in my memory and I could recite them’.

There is another interesting example of yoga nidra. In Europe, once I had to give a lecture to a group of doctors. I was twelve years old at that time. What can a twelve-year-old child talk to doctors about? I went to sleep at night and did yoga nidra and I dreamt that I was giving a lecture. I did not know in my dream what I was talking about. I woke up. I remembered each and every point I had spoken. I went to the conference room and gave that lecture. At the end of the lecture, a doctor asked me where I had studied. I said, “In the ashram.” He said, “Do you know what you have spoken about?” I said, “Would I speak about anything that I didn’t know?” He said, “You have spoken about the biofeedback system, a system which is recently being developed, and that we are looking into. The concept of biofeedback has not yet been propagated in society. Yet you know about it. How did you do that?” I said, “I know it for I have dreamt it.” He thought that I was just bluffing, but I was telling him the truth; I had dreamt it.

That is the state of sensitivity and receptivity that you can attain through the practice of yoga nidra, and not only children but also adults. You can also do that. But first you have to allow the barriers of tension and stress to be eliminated. Once those barriers have been eliminated, a new state of mind develops which I call mind-sight, *antar drishti*. Once you develop that mind-sight, as a natural and

spontaneous ability, no knowledge is inaccessible to you. That much I can assure you. Everything becomes accessible. This is the effect of yoga nidra. For many years' scientists have been speaking about the power of the subconscious mind. Many books have been written on it. Yoga nidra is a clear practice that accesses the power of the subconscious mind and leads to relaxation, both physiological and psychological.

Learn how to focus

The third aspect you need to acquire and perfect for raja yoga is learning how to focus. Trataka is the most effective technique to focus the mind, to clear the mind of confusions, conflicts, stresses and tensions. The latest research has shown that trataka stimulates the production of melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone of the pineal and pituitary glands in the head, which is secreted only in the darkest hour of the night between two and four and maybe only one drop the size of the top of a pin is secreted. It is that period between two and four when one relaxes absolutely and completely as that hormone is going through the system.

Trataka enhances the production of melatonin. You can do it even during the day by gazing at a candle. The practice is simple. Light a candle and place it at eye level, an arm's length away. Remove your glasses and just stare at the black flame around the wick. Not the yellow flame but in the centre of the flame around the wick there will be a black flame. Focus on it without blinking your eyes. When the eyes get tired and you feel the need to close them, close the eyes and look at the after image of the flame that you can see inside. The after-image of the flame will be of the reverse colour. What is yellow outside will be green inside and what is black outside will be white inside. The reverse colour will be seen. You will also find that the image of the flame moves up, down, to the side, in all directions. Try to hold that image in the centre of *chidakasha*, the space behind the closed eyes, or *bhrumadhya*, the eyebrow centre. After a few moments, the image will disappear.

Again open your eyes and start looking at the candle. Gaze at the candle without blinking the eyelids. When you feel the

urge to close them, close them. Again see the after-image till it disappears. Try to hold it steady. The eyes will water as you are holding them open without blinking. The nerves will be stimulated and the optical nerves are connected to the brain and the brain will respond and alter the function of the endocrine glands, depending on what condition it is going through. Therefore, *trataka*, due to its effect on the optical nerves, stimulates the production of melatonin. *Trataka* also helps to improve the eyesight, especially short-sightedness. There are physical benefits as well, but *trataka* is one of the most powerful techniques to focus the mind.

I am giving you certain practical hints and guidelines which you can start to put into practice from today at your leisure and in your own time. Once we are able to receive sufficient relaxation and acquire concentration, then our attitudes change. Our attitude changes with the relaxation of mind, and it is this change in attitude, it is this relaxation of mind, which will make our life more happy and healthy.

As far as the idea of living gracefully is concerned, I do believe firmly that grace is an outcome of a harmonious and balanced perception of life. All we have to do is try to acquire this balanced perception of life by using the tools that yoga has given us. If there is no balanced perception of life, there is no grace. So we have to somehow make the effort in our own routines, in our professions, in our social structure, in our own family system, to create an environment and separate out a time when we can try to connect with our own inner nature.

People think 'I do my *pooja* every day, I say my mantra every day, isn't that enough time for my spiritual pursuit?' Your *pooja*, your worship and your *upasana* is your own choice. How much you do, how much you do not do is totally dependent on you. However, just as you have the habit to eat when you are hungry, to sleep when you are tired, in the same manner you have to develop the habit to relax in *yoga nidra*, you have to develop a habit to access your mind through mantra – *So Ham* or any other mantra. You have been given a folder with three mantras in them: the *Mahamritunjaya* mantra, the *Gayatri* mantra and the *Durga* mantra. If instead

of doing the mantra *So Ham*, you read those mantras, as instructed in the folders, you will acquire the same benefit.

Practise the mantras in the morning, practise yoga nidra when you come home after a hard day's work and practise five minutes of meditation at night, while you lie in bed; you don't even have to sit in any posture to meditate. Let everything be natural and spontaneous. If you can do these three things: three mantras in the morning, yoga nidra when you come home, and ajapa japa, *So Ham* meditation before sleep, it is enough to create a positive, qualitative transformation in your attitude, your behaviour, your perception and your personality.

I will request you to allow yoga to be in your life using these three things, forget about asana, forget about pranayama. Since you are all professional people and have diverse routines, if you have time to practise asana, pranayama – wonderful, do it. However, if you do not have time to practise don't worry about it, only stick to these three practices, and when you have time and inclination, then get involved with the practices of asana, pranayama, shatkarmas and other techniques. Then you will find that with the relaxation of the mind, your own spiritual strengths are cultivated. Spirituality is a strength, a quality which one needs to cultivate in life. Do not confuse spirituality with religious nature or behaviour. For me they are two different things absolutely poles apart. Spirituality, or *adhyatma* in Hindi, means making the effort to come to realize your own inner nature, to come closer to your spirit. How will we come closer to our own spirit or inner nature? Not in terms of atma or paramatma, but in terms of the source of strength and power within, which is the root of our life cultivating the positive and creative within us.

Hence, body, mind and spirit, although they are three different ideas, acknowledge them as one unit, and all three are contained in you. It is due to your conviction or understanding, whether you use them, abuse them or misuse them. Right now we have misused and abused the qualities and the strengths that we have gained in this life. Let us take a sankalpa to make proper use of them. And that is yoga.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The three mantras about which you have spoken, should they be recited loudly or mentally?

They should be recited in a normal voice, just as you speak, audible to you only. You do not have to use a megaphone to announce to everyone that, 'I am practising mantra, I have become a sadhu.' Just repeat the mantra in a soft voice, audible to you only.

Swamiji, are there any rays, like alpha, beta, gamma rays which come out while doing yoga nidra?

It is an interesting question. In normal conditions, beta waves are predominant. When you are walking on the road, when there are many people and distractions all around and you are looking everywhere, at that moment beta waves are most predominant. When you came into the room and sat down quietly, not speaking to anybody, there was silence in the room, at that moment, alpha waves became predominant and beta subsided. Beta represents the wave of *bahirmukhi vritti*, the extroverted consciousness and extrovert senses. Alpha represents the wave of *antarmukhi vritti*, when you become silent and self-contained, introspective.

Theta is the third wave, which emerges when you are in the state of intense concentration, like when you are totally focused on your work. When children are studying very intensely, at that time theta waves are predominant. When you meditate, at that time theta waves are predominant. When you move into the yoga nidra state, you go through alpha and theta, and delta becomes predominant, *antar jagriti*. Hence, in yoga nidra, we move from the alpha to the theta state, coming to delta. That happens only momentarily. Perfection in yoga nidra is achieved when you can remain in delta for longer periods.

Alpha waves appear more frequently when the eyes are closed; beta waves appear as soon as the eyes are open. Alpha waves correspond to a quiet mental state and beta to mental activity.

Research with EEGs indicate a significant change in the brain's activity, even when the eyes are simply opened then closed. Alpha waves appear more frequently when the eyes are closed; beta waves appear as soon as the eyes are opened. Alpha waves correspond to a quiet mental state, beta to mental activity. Simple light stimulation will also affect many changes in the mind and body. Thus, by allowing in less light and keeping the source of stimulation constant, one can temporarily deactivate the functioning of the stimulation/response mechanism. The mind, which was lost somewhere in the outside world, is regained. Now the work of real concentration may begin.

During the practice of yoga nidra, some people may fall asleep. The EEG pattern and maps will then clearly show the appearance of theta and delta wave dominance. This is how yoga nidra is capable of inducing deep sleep and a state of deep relaxation, which is characterized by awareness rather than unconsciousness, as in normal sleep.

The two hemispheres of the brain rarely operate together and the ability of yoga nidra to generate synchronized and symmetrical alpha and delta indicates its possible beneficial application in a large variety of psychosomatic problems.

In 1988, at Charing Cross Medical School in London, an interesting experiment was performed over a period of six months on yoga nidra. The results of that research, which measured the brain waves, are presented in the book *Yoga Nidra*. In the initial stage, when a person is lying down and preparing to do yoga nidra, there was a high level of beta activity. Alpha activity was restricted to a section of the brain. As the relaxation increased, synchronization of alpha waves predominated, gradually spreading through both the hemispheres and dominating the brain. When I looked at the image, the blue colour indicating alpha waves emerged in the form of clouds, and I remembered the following sloka:

Shanta Karam – Prayer to Lord Vishnu

*Shanta Karam Bhujaga Shayanam,
Padmanabham Suresham.
Vishvadharam Gagana Sadrusham,
Megha Varnam Shubhangam.
Lakshmi Kantam Kamala Nayanam,
Yogibhir Dhyana Gamyam.
Vande Vishnum Bhava Bhaya Haram,
Sarva Lokaia Kanatham.*

I adore Lord Vishnu
who is the embodiment of peace,
who lies on the Shesha serpent,
whose navel is the source of the Lotus of the Universe,
whose complexion is swarthy like the clouds,
whose body shines with heavenly beauty,
who is the beloved of Goddess Lakshmi,
whose eyes are like lotus,
who is meditated upon by the yogis,
who is the remover of the fear of the world process,
the cycle of birth and death.

That is the sloka which indicates the state of yoga nidra. We also say that Vishnu is always in the state of yoga nidra, reclining on the Shesha serpent.

The image of the brain during the deep relaxation phase of yoga nidra is a beautiful blue, covering the entire brain, indicating high theta and delta activity. The research report about the change in the brainwave patterns is presented in the book *Yoga Nidra*.

The first question is: our sufferings can be attributed to our past misdeeds, but if I have to atone for our past misdeeds, for our bad karma by suffering, why alleviate the suffering? The second question is: we don't know why we suffer. So doesn't that mean human suffering is only retributive, not reformative? The third question is: does human suffering serve any purpose? If so, why alleviate it at all?

Mahatma Buddha used to say that the entire world is suffering and *nirvana* is liberation from that suffering. In our tradition, there are three kinds of suffering: *adidaivik*, *adhibhautik*, *adhyatmik*. No one is free from them. Then there are certain theories which say that suffering is a reflection of our past actions. Nobody disputes that also. We accept all ideas.

If you analyze your situation in life, and the concept of evolution and growth, suffering is the instrument by which we evolve. It is the catalyst for evolution. If there was no suffering, there would be no search for health and peace. If there was no disease, there would be no medicine. So in the normal evolutionary process, suffering becomes the catalyst for growth and change and therefore it becomes a natural law.

Now, the point you were raising is that if suffering in this life is due to our *prarabdha karma*, past karmas, and you should allow it to be purified, then why worry about the suffering? Well, you are right, but there are few people with that mentality. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one such person who used to say, "Look, I have throat cancer and I can ask Mother to help me, but it will be like asking Mother to plough the land with an elephant, it will be like asking Mother to kill a mosquito with a gun." So there was an acceptance of suffering. He said, "No, I am not going to do anything for it, for I know that it is my karma." That is one approach, but only a few people can have that approach and suffer the pain with happiness. Ramakrishna was able to suffer the pain with happiness. We are weak individuals and always in search of a state of life in which we are comfortable. In the search for comfort we avoid pain and suffering. As long as our mind is weak, let us make the effort to overcome the suffering, for

the mental weakness will enhance and increase the potency of the suffering more.

The effort that you are making to alleviate your suffering, is not physical, it is more mental. When I speak to doctors I tell them that they are researching every kind of illness, except one, which they have done nothing for. The disease is DIFS – Disease Induced Fear Syndrome. When you make the effort to overcome that suffering you are actually dealing with your mind and you are helping to manage your fear. Once the fear goes away, the disease will run its course without increasing, without intensifying it will clear itself. That is the yoga concept and it is for this reason that we say that yoga is not a therapy. It helps the patients to reorganize and rebalance their system. Once that is done, disease will run its natural course and be eliminated fast.

Swamiji, you said that yoga was practised a long time back in Scandinavian countries, in South America and Africa, but it is now believed that homo sapiens were first born and developed in Africa. From there they travelled to the whole of the world. Now did this yoga concept travel with them or it existed automatically in different societies?

It is difficult to pinpoint whether yoga developed with homo sapiens in Africa and then moved with them around the world or not. I do believe that yoga began when individuals first became aware of themselves as individuals and they started to question: What is this? Where am I? What are those glittering things in the sky? What is that ball of fire in the sky? What is that silvery disc at night that I see? How do I survive? Why do I need to eat? Such questions emerged in the minds of people over a period of time and led them to the discovery of yoga.

Whether yoga was practised on the American, European, Asian or African continent, five thousand years, four thousand or three thousand years ago, that is secondary. Primary is that yoga provided a way to know one's relationship and connection with nature and the cosmos. Yoga is a journey of discovery and we cannot pinpoint which civilization did it. The statues and other evidences that exist today of the

yogic culture reflect only five thousand years of history. If we look into our own shastras we can believe that there have been different civilizations in the past on this planet. We are not the first and the final civilization. Evidence of such civilizations is also coming out in the form of Atlantis, in the form of other continents which have submerged, and people who have migrated. This means that prior to this civilization which started in the last ten thousand years after the last ice age, there were other civilizations as well. Maybe yoga was left to us by the previous civilization and we simply adopted it as part of our tradition and culture. So it is not possible to give a date to the emergence of yoga, as we do not know which civilization started it, just let us be happy that it was the human civilization.

Yoga in Brief

14 March 2008, Hyderabad

According to tradition, the subject of hatha yoga was taught by Lord Shiva to Parvati and that was the first instruction on yoga. This subject of yoga was heard by a fish and that fish, eventually with the grace of Shiva, took incarnation as Guru Matsyendranath, who propagated hatha yoga in this world. Later it was followed by many other hatha yogis who made the subject and the philosophy of hatha yoga available to the future generations for times to come.

Similarly, just as hatha yoga was taught by Shiva to Mother Parvati, raja yoga was taught by Shiva to Ananta Sheshnag who, in the form of Maharshi Patanjali, propagated raja yoga. Raja yoga was the second yoga to be taught by Shiva.

The third yoga which was taught in practical life by another avatar was that of karma yoga. Sri Krishna instructed Arjuna in the subject of karma yoga. He told Arjuna that this was one topic which had not been taught in the world and that it was an ancient subject. He said, “I taught this topic in the early days to Brahma and other sages and now for the first time I am giving you the lessons and instructions on karma yoga.” This was the message of Krishna to Arjuna.

The fourth yoga which emerged was bhakti yoga. The lesson of bhakti yoga was given by Lord Shiva to Parvati and by Sri Rama to mother Shabari. These four yogas are original yogas according to yogic parampara and they follow a sequence.

Towards bhakti

Sri Swami Satyananda says that in any process of meditation, whether it is the process of raja yoga meditation, whether it be the process of bhakti yoga meditation, whether it be the process of karma yoga meditation, or whether it be the process of hatha yoga meditation, three things are important and visible at first: the practitioner, the *sadhaka*; the method, the practice adopted, the *sadhana*; and the aim or goal of the sadhana, the *sadhya*.

You are a normal person. You have an aspiration in mind that you are going to achieve this experience or acquire something. That becomes your goal, and the method which you adopt to come to your goal is the sadhana.

Any journey begins with these three: sadhaka, sadhana and sadhya. In the course of the journey, eventually the sadhana disappears as sadhana becomes an integral part of the sadhaka's lifestyle, behaviour and attitude. Then only two things remain: the sadhaka and the goal. As you progress further the sadhaka drops away and only the goal remains, because eventually the sadhaka merges with the goal.

Your journey started with awareness of three: I the sadhaka, my process the sadhana, and my object the sadhya. Yet the ultimate culmination is being one with your sadhya. So from traitvad you go to dvaitvad, from dvaitvad you go to advaitvad, and this is the process of bhakti.

Bhakti – is it only devotion? No, it is a process of psychological inner transformation in every individual. It is not devotion only, but it is a process of psychological transformation. I will give you one indication of bhakti. It is a process of transformation in the sense that it allows the mind to identify with that which is positive, creative and transcendental. It gives a focus to the mind to convert the negative outgoing emotions into transformative ones and to regenerate positive feelings and emotions.

Glossary

Advaita – non-duality

Ahamkara – faculty of ego; awareness of the existence of ‘I’;
one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument

Ahimsa – non-violence in thought, word and deed; one of the
yamas according to Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*

Ajapa japa – continuous, spontaneous repetition of mantra;
meditation practice in which mantra is coordinated with
breath

Ajna chakra – psychic centre or vortex situated at the medulla
oblongata at the top of the spinal column; seat of intuition;
higher knowledge; third eye

Anahata chakra – psychic or pranic centre situated in the spine
behind the sternum; associated physically with the cardiac
plexus, heart and lungs, mentally with emotion, especially
love, and spiritually with atma, the spirit

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness

Anandamaya kosha – sheath or body of bliss; the innermost
sheath of the embodied spirit

Anasakta bhava – feeling, attitude of non-attachment

Anasakti – non-attached; unaffected, emotionally detached;
indifference to all sense experiences

Annamaya kosha – sheath or body of matter; the physical body

Antar mouna – inner silence; meditative technique belonging
to the fifth step of raja yoga (pratyahara)

Anushasana – rules, precepts, discipline

Anushthana – mantra sadhana for a specific period of time with strict discipline

Aparigraha – non-possessiveness; one of the five yamas of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*

Aradhana – worship

Artha – prosperity; material need; accomplishment; effort to obtain emotional, social, or even financial security

Asana – a specific yoga posture; used in hatha yoga to channel prana, open the chakras and remove energy blocks; in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour; hermitage; dwelling or abode of asceticism and spiritual practice

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi

Asteya – honesty, not stealing

Atma – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life; highest reality; Supreme Consciousness; spirit; soul

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all

Avastha – state of consciousness or condition of the mind

Bandha – psycho-muscular energy locks which close the pranic exits (like throat, anus); psychic locks that concentrate the flow of energy in the body at one point or plexus

Bhagavad Gita – 'divine song'; Sri Krishna's discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy; containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – complete devotion to the higher reality of life

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a higher reality of life; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen and purify the emotions

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind

Bhoga – sensual enjoyment; external experience

Bija – seed; seed state; source, origin

Brahmacharya – continence or absolute control of sensual impulses, conduct leading to the highest state of existence

Brahman – ever-expanding, limitless consciousness; name of Supreme Consciousness or Cosmic Intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; monistic concept of absolute reality

Brahma vidya – knowledge of the supreme

Buddhi – discerning; discriminating aspect of mind; higher intelligence; intuitive aspect of mind

Chakra – circle, wheel or vortex; pranic/psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis) in the body; the seven major chakras for descent of divine energy or for human evolution are sahasrara, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; storehouse of memory or samskaras

Chitta vritti – manifestations of the mind; disposition or state of mind; inclination

Daan – unconditional giving

Darshan – a glimpse; vision; direct perception

Dharana – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point

Dharma – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness; one of the four purusharthas

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

Diksha – initiation, giving 'vision'

Dukha – suffering; pain

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti (nature) are sattwa, rajas and tamas

Gurukul – ancient system of education in an ashram environment

Hatha yoga – system of yoga for attaining physical and mental purity and balancing the pranas in the body

Himsa – anything which disrupts the natural flow of human perception and consciousness; violence, killing, harm, injury

Ida nadi – a major pranic channel running from mooladhara chakra to ajna chakra, governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain

Indriya – sense organ; power of the senses

Ishta devata – object of worship, one's chosen deity

Ishwara – God, as the undecaying principle

Ishwara pranidhana – complete dedication to higher consciousness; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*

Jagrat – the waking state; dimension of consciousness related to the senses and the phenomenal material universe

Jala tattwa – water element

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra

Jignasu – enquirer

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being

Jivatma – the individual soul

Jnana – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and study of the scriptures; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom

Kama, kamana – emotional, sensual fulfilment; love; lust; one of the four purusharthas

Karana sharira – dimension of spirit

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect

Klesha – pain, affliction, suffering; five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz avidya (ignorance), asmita (sense of 'I' identity), raga (attraction), dwesha (aversion), and abhinivesha (fear of death); in yoga the five kleshas are the sources of all suffering or troubles, with ignorance being considered the chief klesha

Kosha – sheath or body; a dimension of experience and existence; the five koshas are: annamaya kosha, prana-

maya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijñanamaya kosha, and anandamaya kosha

Kriya – action; cleansing practice (shatkarma); practice of the system of kriya yoga

Kriya yoga – practices designed to hasten spiritual evolution

Kundalini shakti – also referred to as ‘kundalini’; the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which when awakened, awakens the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Vedavyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes

Manas – finite mind, rational mind; the mind concerned with senses, thought and counter-thought; perception, intelligence; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument

Manipura chakra – literally, ‘city of jewels’; psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the navel; associated with the solar plexus and digestive organs and mentally with willpower; source of vitality and energy

Manomaya kosha – sheath or body of mental experience

Mantra – sound vibrations which liberate the mind and expand the consciousness when repeated

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya; one of the four purusharthas

Muni – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind

Nadi – channel of energy, psychic current

Navanga yoga – nine steps of bhakti yoga

Nirakara – the unmanifest, impersonal God

Niyama – observance of rules or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; second stage of ashtanga yoga in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*: shaucha (purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), swadhyaya (self-study) and Ishwara pranidhana (surrender to God)

Om – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the Supreme Reality or Brahman; conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence

Paramatma – Cosmic Soul or Consciousness; Supreme Spirit

Parampara – tradition, lineage

Patanjali – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga, including ashtanga or eight-limbed yoga

Pingala nadi – a major pranic channel in the body which conducts the dynamic pranic force manifesting as prana shakti from the right side of mooladhara chakra; criss-crossing the spine through the major chakras to the right side of ajna chakra

Pooja – worship

Prakriti – nature; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; the active principle of manifest energy; counterpart of purusha in Samkhya philosophy

Prana – vital energy force sustaining life and creation; permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macrocosmos and microcosmos

Pranamaya kosha – energy sheath, or vital pranic body; the sheath covering the self which is composed of pranic vibration and the rhythm of pranic forces

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body

Prasad – gift, happiness

Pratyahara – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*

Pratyaya – memory, archetype; seed or impression in the field of consciousness which does not disappear even in the first stages of samadhi; content of mind

Prithvi tattwa – earth element

Purushartha – human attainment; self-effort; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation)

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which contains ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path

Rajas – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement

Ramacharitamanas – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas, composed in poetic form

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Rama. The most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly for the attainment of inner experience

Sadvichara – right enquiry; appropriate thinking

Sadvyavahara – right, appropriate behaviour

Sahasrara chakra – 'thousand-petalled lotus'; abode of Shiva or super-consciousness; highest chakra or psychic centre, it symbolizes the threshold between the psychic and spiritual realms and is located at the crown of the head

Sakara – with form; manifest

Sakshi – that which observes the phenomenal reality without being affected; witness

Samadhi – culmination of meditation; state of unity with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; balanced wisdom; the eighth stage of raja yoga

Samkhya – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy; spiritual science based on the division of all existence into the two eternal principles of purusha and prakriti, and the twenty-three elements of creation; the spiritual basis of the yoga system

Sampradaya – sect

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way

Samyama – mastery, self-discipline over one's behaviour

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments

Sanskriti – culture

Santosha – contentment; satisfaction; one of the five niyamas in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*

Sanyam – restraint, self-discipline

Satkarma – literally 'true action'; doing good acts; any act that helps another person

Satsang – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; association with the wise and the good

Sattwa – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity

Satya, satyam – truth; speaking the truth; being truthful to oneself; honesty; one of the yamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga

Seva – selfless service

Shakti – power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; primal energy; manifest consciousness; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a goddess

Sharira – the body (of animate or inanimate objects); the constituent element; bodily strength

Shastra – an authoritative treatise on any subject, particularly science and religion; sacred book

Shatkarma, shatkriya – the six hatha yoga techniques of purification: neti, dhauti, basti, nauli, kapalbhati and trataka

Shaucha – cleanliness; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga

Shraddha – faith

So Ham – mantra used in ajapa japa; said to be the unconscious repetitive prayer produced by the breath itself

Sthira – stable

Sthitaprajna – one whose wisdom is firmly established and does not waver, who is unmoved by the dualities (e.g. pleasure and pain, gain and loss) and is unshakeably established in super-consciousness

Sthoola sharira – gross, physical body; annamaya kosha

Sukha – pleasure, enjoyment

Sukshma sharira – subtle body composed of pranamaya, manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas; part of the subconscious which manifests in the dream state

Swabhava – one's own essential nature

Swadhisthana chakra – second psychic/pranic centre; located in the coccyx; associated with the sacral plexus and governing the urogenital system; storehouse of subconscious impressions

Swadhyaya – self-observation; self-study; continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; one of the niyamas recommended by Sage Patanjali's Yoga Sutras; study of the scriptures and texts of yoga

Swapna – second dimension of consciousness; subconscious realm of mind, state of dreaming, the mind is looking inwards, seeing the internal experience, not the external objects

Swaroopa – one's own form or shape, natural state or condition

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana, including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices

Tapasya – practice of austerity, self-discipline and purification

Tattwa – true essential nature; element, primary substance; the five elements (space, air, fire, water and earth)

Turiya – fourth dimension of consciousness; super-consciousness; simultaneous awareness of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind which links and transcends them; a state of liberation

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally 108 in number, containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, 'to sit near and listen' (to the spiritual teacher)

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires

Vasana – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires

Vedas – ancient texts explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BC

Vedanta – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita), a philosophy stating one non-dual eternal principle underlying and causing all creation

Vichara – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth

Vidya – knowledge or science, particularly knowledge of spiritual truth and non-mundane reality

Vijnanamaya kosha – astral or psychic sheath or body; one of the sheaths of the soul, consisting of the subtler level of our own existence with its vision, intuition, wisdom and power of understanding; the covering of the self which is made of knowledge

Vishuddhi chakra – literally, ‘centre of purification’, the psychic/pranic centre located at the level of the throat pit or the thyroid gland; it is the psychic centre particularly connected with purification and communication

Vishwas – conviction

Viveka – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha

Viyoga – separation

Vritti – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular mental state or condition

Yama – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil; first stage of ashtanga yoga in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga*

Sutras: ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), asteya (honesty), brahmacharya (continence) and aparigraha (abstention from greed)

Yantra – geometric symbol

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy

Yoga nidra – ‘psychic sleep’; pratyahara practice in which the body sleeps while the mind remains aware as its movements are guided and quietened by instructions, inducing deep relaxation of body, mind and emotions

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice

Yudhishtira – literally, ‘firm in battle’; name of the eldest Pandava brother in the *Mahabharata* epic

Yuga – an age, epoch or cycle of earth and mankind; the four ages (Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and the present Kali Yuga) combine to make one Maha Yuga of 432,000 years

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Notes

Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



“When you incorporate the yogic principles, attitudes and mentality in your daily routine, then that is known as the yogic lifestyle. Your life actions are guided by your inner wisdom and not by the rules or conditions set by your household or society. When yoga becomes a part of your lifestyle, you become a vibrant participant in society and your family. Once the quality of life is improved by following the precepts of yoga in the normal routine, yoga becomes a balanced and harmonious lifestyle.”

Volume Eight of *Yoga Sadhana Panorama* contains discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati from 2004 to 2008 in several cities of India. Many topics pertaining to yoga, spiritual life and the role yoga can play to enhance the quality of one’s day-to-day life are presented in a clear and practical manner, inviting everyone to live a yogic lifestyle.



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